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IMPRESSIONS AND MEMORIES

By

JAMES ASHCROFT NOBLE

Author of

"The Sonnet in England, and other Essays," etc.

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IMPRESSIONS
& MEMORIES
BY J.^{ames} ASHCROFT
— NOBLE —



J. M. DENT AND CO.
ALDINE HOUSE
— LONDON. 1895 —

TO MY CHILDREN

To Irene, my first-born, who may some day, I hope, write worthy books of her own; to dear Philip, not less near to us because he stands in that Light of which our summer sunshine is but the shadow; to Helen, whose love makes household ministries divine; to Mary, the mighty book-girl, with her forward gaze towards the mathematical tripos; and to the twelve-years-old Lancelot, who thinks that I should be better employed in celebrating Stoddart's team than in writing such "rot" as is to be found in these and previous pages—this little book is dedicated by

Their loving father

J. ASHCROFT NOBLE.

A NOTE OF COURTESY.

FEW books really demand a preface, and this is not one of the few. A word of grateful acknowledgment is, however, required of me. Some of the following essays appear for the first time; two are reprinted from a little book of mine, which has long been unprocureable; but the large remainder consists of papers which have previously been published in various magazines and journals. For kindly permission to gather them into this volume, my thanks are due to my dear friend, Mr R. H. Hutton of the Spectator, and to the courteous editors of Longman's Magazine, the Bookman, the Leisure Hour, the Literary World, Chambers's Journal, Literary Opinion, and the Westminster Gazette.

As I am in duty bound to write these few prefatory sentences, I would like to explain

A Note of Courtes.

an omission which may seem almost unpardonable to lovers of poetry. The essay on Some Skylark Poems was written and published prior to the appearance of Mr William Watson's supremely beautiful lyric, The First Skylark of Spring, the latest, the tenderest, and, as some of us think, the loveliest flower in this small but precious anthology. Of the entire mass of Mr Watson's work, which I have known and loved for twenty years, I hope, if life and strength be prolonged, to write in some future volume.

J. A. N.

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THE JUSTIFICATION OF IMPRESSIONS.

IN the days when those of us who are now middle-aged were young, criticism was regarded by everybody—by the critic and the criticised alike—as simple adjudication. The former was at once jurymen and judge; he summed up the evidence, he gave the verdict, he benignly dismissed the arraigned author or sternly pronounced his sentence. True, there was no *lex scripta* of literature answering to the Common Law of the realm, but there was a recognised body of tradition vaguely answering to the precedents of the Court of Equity. Thus, Milton had been condemned because in “Paradise Lost” he had flown in the face of the unwritten rule that the hero of an epic should always be victorious; Shakspeare because he had flouted the time-honoured trio of dramatic unities; and though here and there might be one who dared to challenge the judgment of the court, there was none bold enough to question its jurisdiction. The critic was a judge by unchartered prescription,

and it seemed quite natural and right that the projectors of the *Edinburgh Review* should choose as a motto for their venture, *Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*. These young men took themselves seriously, and the world accepted them at their own valuation.

But this is ancient history. The swing of the pendulum of time knows no interruptions, and recently we have learned from many confident and superior persons, who for the most part speak with the recognised infallibility of youth, that criticism is not judgment of any kind—authoritative or non-authoritative—but simply autobiography; the statement of personal impressions rather than the pronouncement of verdicts based on large impersonal considerations. That the rebels are often very emphatic in pronouncing verdicts of their own is a mere detail; and of all argumentative weapons the charge of inconsistency is generally the most ineffective. Still, I might be tempted to use it did I think that the prophets of the new criticism were wholly wrong, but it seems to me that they are largely right, and that their view is faulty by limitation rather than by error. Indeed, it does not fairly fall under the suspicion which attaches to novelty, for the very old saying that there is no disputing about differences of taste seems to imply that art, which appeals so

much more constantly to sensibility than to judgment, can hardly be subject to hard and fast rubrics of reason. As a matter of fact, we know that it constantly eludes them. If my neighbour tells me that Longfellow's "Excelsior" is a finer poem than Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn," I may gasp and stare, or I may rudely contradict him, but I must admit that I fail to see how I am to convict him of error, and yet, if the judicial theory be correct, such conviction ought to be easy. Then, too, it is curious to remember that the great judges who administered statutes or applied precedents often gave most unaccountably discordant decisions. Everyone of them was, so to speak, the President of a Court of Appeal, whose business it was to reverse the judgments of all the other courts. The *Quarterly*, "so savage and tartarly" to Whig poetry and fiction, found Tory poetry and fiction wholly admirable, and curiously enough the *Edinburgh* discovered that the Whigs had all the genius and good English, the Tories all the folly and fustian. One feels that only personal preferences could possibly explain such diverse interpretations of a common code.

It would seem, then, that whether we adopt the *a priori* or the *a posteriori* method, whether we judge from the nature of things or from such evidence as is available, criticism is at bottom a statement of these

preferences; and such a statement is of course what the young scribes call it—autobiography. The heroine of Mrs Humphrey Ward's first novel, "Miss Bretherton"—a book hardly less interesting than any of its more famous successors—makes the confession, "I only know what touches me, what I like—that's all I know in anything"; and Wallace, the critic, airily replies, "It's all we any of us know. We begin with 'I like' and 'I don't like'; then we begin to be proud and make distinctions and find reasons, and we come back in the end to 'I like' and 'I don't like.'" This is a brief and eminently lucid statement of the autobiographical theory; but what renders it interesting is the reference to the second stage of general experience. Why do we—and by "we," of course, are meant men and women in general—begin to make distinctions and find reasons? Surely because it is in human nature to do so, because it is natural not only to receive impressions and to arrange them in order of preference, but to justify such arrangement—to persuade ourselves or others that there is something of reasonableness and not of mere whim in "I like much," "I like less," or "I don't like at all."

Here, then, I think we get a glimpse of the limitation or defect of the newest theory of criti-

cism—its exclusive regard to the *statement* of an impression, which is autobiography naked and unashamed, and its disregard of the *justification* of impressions—the support of the individual preference by a victorious appeal to the common sensibility and the common reason. The old conception of the critic as judge was not wholly wrong; the mistake was in supposing him to be the bondsman of statutes once delivered, not the free interpreter of the evolution of the human spirit.

It is unnecessary to say anything about recent pleas for what is called “scientific criticism,” because to anyone who has even a rudimentary apprehension of what is meant by the word “art,” the phrase is simply nonsense. Poetry, for example, is a typical form of art; and, as Coleridge pointed out, poetry and science are antipodal. Thus, what is called “scientific criticism” in the pages of Mr R. G. Moulton, and other able exponents, is something which may be instructive and very useful, but it is not, in any intelligible sense of the word, criticism at all. The critic as autobiographer has more to say for himself than the critic as *savant*, but the more is not quite enough; his error is inadequacy rather than perversity. Indeed, on all hands we should be spared much unnecessary writing, a great deal of elaborate beating of the bush which never

raises the hare—which, in fact, never raises anything but blinding and choking dust—if people would only think the matter out to the bottom and to the end, and acknowledge that literary criticism is simply the application to books of the ordinary faculty of judgment, rendered efficient by sensibility and knowledge. Appraisalment of books is exactly the same kind of mental activity as appraisalment of wine or of horses, the only differences being that in the former case the issues raised are more numerous and more complex than in the latter. With regard to wine one has only to ask whether it is wholesome, healthy, exhilarating, and grateful to the educated palate ; with regard to horses the only question is whether they possess the qualities which conduce to speed or strength. Wine and horses can only serve a few ends, but books serve many ends, each one of which can be attained in different ways ; and therefore the right judgment of them demands the acquisition of such varied knowledge and the cultivation of such varied sensibilities that people have come to regard it as, in some vague undefined way, a unique intellectual exercise.

Hence have arisen those numerous foolish and futile questions concerning it which have so often been solemnly put and laboriously answered ; for example, the question whether literary criticism is science, or

art, or neither. Of course, like all other criticism, it demands something of both. The knowledge essential to a just judgment—say, for instance, the knowledge of the difference between the dramatic handling of Sophocles and that of Shakspeare—is science; the application of that knowledge to an estimate of either writer is art. Mr John M. Robertson has written an interesting but rather irritating book entitled “*Essays towards a Critical Method*”; but there is, there can be, no fertile method in criticism but the method of teaching ourselves to know largely, to feel exquisitely and rightly; and any other method is what Carlyle would have called a “*Morison’s pill*.” Still there are in Mr Robertson’s book certain illuminating sentences, such as those in which he assails Matthew Arnold’s description of the work of criticism as a seeing of “the object as in itself it really is.” Mr Robertson shrewdly points out that such seeing is impossible.

“We can but know the thing as it is to our minds—to given orders of mind; and what happens in science is the gradual agreement among given orders of mind that on investigation things are so-and-so. What the critic may hope to do is similarly to persuade given orders of mind, by comparison and reasoning, that things are so-and-so, and to explain to them why it is that to other orders of mind they may be otherwise.”

Here, surely, Mr Robertson's arrow pierces the gold. There is an element of judgment in criticism, there is also an element of autobiography, but above all things criticism is *persuasion*—the justification of impressions. It is the statement of pleas for preferences, differentiations, and assignments of precedence, with a view to bringing about a general accordance of feeling, a consensus of competent and cultivated opinion. And, indeed, the history of criticism is the history of a gradual tendency towards such accordance; but no method can accelerate it, no absence of method can retard it. It is true that there are certain fundamental differences of taste in the world of letters, as there are in other regions, which can never be done away with. But, in the main, the men who know books best agree much more largely than they differ, because the moment they begin to justify their impressions they distinguish between those which do and those which do not admit of justification; and so where a man of wide knowledge and quick sensibility finds himself altogether at issue with the main body of his compeers, he will, in all probability admit that his peculiar difference is a result of personal twist or idiosyncrasy. Thus, Charles Lamb enthusiastically admired the writings of Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, but he did not impeach the judgment of the world which neglected them. He knew that

he was expressing a personal preference for which he could assign no reasons of universal validity, and he knew also that such expressions of naked preference are not criticism but mere autobiography. When he was in the critical mood, as in the admirable essay on the "Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art," he took care that his impressions should have their justification.

Of the essays in this little volume, there are few which are in substance wholly critical, in the sense of being deliberate estimates or appraisements of books and their writers. I think, however, that the greater number of them are examples of that most modest, but not perhaps least useful, method of persuasion, which consists in simply stating one's personal impression, and endeavouring to justify it—the justification being not always dependent upon some external admitted axiom, but being, so to speak, involved in the mere manner of the statement. It is an unambitious method, but it is non-polemical and unaggressive; and it must have seemed sad to many of us that the bitterest of human animosities have often found a *casus belli* in one or other of the two great peace-givers of life—religion and literature.

THE MUSIC OF PROSE.

A NOTE.

CONTEMPORARY critics seem to be pretty well agreed that the special music of verse—that music the presence of which can be attested by scansion—is inadmissible in good prose.♦ This doctrine, though now regarded as *de fide* in the literary *ecclesia*, has only recently gained general assent, and must be regarded simply as a special application of the larger doctrine of the necessary limitations of every artistic vehicle. Painting, for example, when it attempts to give a visual impression of the rounded forms of sculpture, or music when it endeavours to describe rather than to suggest, forsakes its special work, and attempts an alien achievement which can never be successful; and the kind of literature called “word painting,” in which the writer strives to make language serve the purpose of pigments, is generally recognised as a bastard form of art. In like manner the regions of prose and verse have been encircled with a clearer, sharper frontier-line than

they once possessed; and the semi-metrical prose which was once admired warmly, even by "the judicious," is now recognised as faulty by the mere tyro in literary criticism. Lessing and his disciples have established the essential and inviolable independence of every form of art.

There is, however, even yet some confusion of thought concerning the admissible music of prose, and, though much has been made clear, further clarification is not unneeded. Rather more than forty years ago Mr R. H. Horne, the author of "Orion," and a critic of acknowledged grasp and insight, published in his "New Spirit of the Age" an essay on the work of Charles Dickens, in the course of which he referred to the frequent rhythmical character of the great novelist's style as a special merit, quoting, by way of example, a passage from the description of the funeral of little Nell in "The Old Curiosity Shop," which he printed without a single verbal alteration in that irregular blank verse which was much affected by Southey—

"When death strikes down the innocent and young
From every fragile form which he lets
 The parting spirit free,
 A hundred virtues rise,
In shapes of Mercy, Charity, and Love,
To walk the world and bless it.

Of every tear
That sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves
Some good is born, some gentler nature comes."

There is a still more striking passage of the same kind in the "Child's History of England," describing in perfect metrical form the scene on the field of Senlac on the evening after the battle; and when this "Note" was first published in the columns of a literary journal, Mr J. E. Swallow of Hebden Bridge was good enough to supplement my illustrations by the following strikingly metrical passages from the work of a distinguished contemporary proseman. They are to be found in Mr Blackmore's "Lorna Doone," and the page references are, of course, to the one volume edition of the great romance.

"And if one stood beneath an elm, with any heart to look at it,
Lo! all the ground was strewn with flakes (too small to know their meaning),
And all the sprays above were rasped and trembling with a redness.
And so I stopped beneath the tree, and carved L. D. upon it,
And wondered at the buds of thought that seemed to swell inside me." (P. 108.)

"In vain she strove, from year to year,
To make the young men hearken,
To teach them what became their birth,
And give them sense of honour." (P. 113.)

“As yet I had not truly learned the evil of our living,
The scorn of law, the outrage, and the sorrow caused
to others.

It even was a point with all to hide the roughness
from me,

To show me but the gallant side, and keep in shade
the other.” (P. 118.)

That writing of this kind, if it be otherwise good, has a certain charm may be readily admitted. That the charm, such as it is, is attained by illegitimate means, and is, therefore, factitious and not wholly admirable, will now be conceded with equal readiness; but the point which is at present in danger of being overlooked is that the faultiness of these and similar passages lies, not in the mere *presence* of metrical rhythm, but in its undue prolongation and sustainment, which spoils the prose by robbing it of its own special character, and yet does not suffice to confer upon it the peculiar beauty of actual verse.

It will be found on examination that it is hardly possible to cite a single example of impassioned and imaginative prose, which is altogether devoid of metrical *phrases*; but in good prose, classical prose, prose “of the centre,” to quote Mr Andrew Lang’s happy *mot*, the metrical effect is confined to the phrase; it does not overflow into the sentence, much less pervade the paragraph. George Eliot’s early style is as nearly perfect as a style can be—it is

strong, simple, flexible ; it has ease with dignity, and glow without glitter, and it neither rises above nor falls below the expressional needs of the matter which it embodies ; but in her best work the metrical phrase, though never obtrusive, is of constant occurrence. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this—probably the only instance in which a whole sentence becomes metrical—is that sentence in Dinah's wonderful prayer with and for Hetty in the condemned cell, when ardent faith and pleading love having risen to the plane of spiritual vision, she exclaims : “ Yea, Lord, I see Thee coming through the darkness, coming like the morning, with healing in Thy wings.” Here the metrical feeling is unusually sustained, and legitimately so, because we find as a fact of Nature that the utterance of profound emotion tends to sustinment of rhythmical cadence, as in the immortal pleading of Ruth, “ Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest I will go ; and where thou lodgest I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” In George Eliot, however, even passages of description or narrative which are charged with feeling rise for an instant into true metre, as in the following sentence from

"The Mill on the Floss," where it will be seen that the concluding words fall into pure iambic verse :
"The boat reappeared, but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted ; living through again in one supreme moment the days when they *had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.*"

The same effect is apparent in a sentence in the fifth volume of "Modern Painters," which, as a whole, is characterised by the varied and unsystematic melody of prose, but which, like the sentence just quoted, is brought to a close in the measurable melody of verse. Mr Ruskin writes of the lichens—

"Sharing the stillness of the unimpassioned rock, they share also its endurance ; and while the winds of departing spring scatter the white hawthorn blossom like drifted snow, and summer dims on the parched meadow the drooping of its cowslip gold—far above among the mountains the silver lichen-spots rest, star-like, on the stone ; and the gathering orange-stain *upón the edge of yonder western peak reflects the sunsets of a thousand years.*"

This, also, it will be seen, is a break into iambic verse, and a little earlier in the same passage, we have a series of pure dactyls : "*Trées for the buílder's yard, flówers for the bríde's chamber, córn for the gránary, móss for the gráve.*" Mr Ruskin is, however, the most rhythmical of the great prose writers,

and the proportion of metrical phrases in his work is unusually large ; but if we turn from his books to those of Jeremy Taylor, Charles Lamb, De Quincey, or Mr Walter Pater, we find conclusive evidence of what may be regarded as the inevitableness of metrical phrases, even in passages of typical imaginative prose. So far as the present writer is aware, it has not been noticed that the one sentence of De Quincey which has been most frequently quoted by connoisseurs of prose as specially beautiful and perfect, contains a verse which might pass as an English hexameter, and which is, as it stands, perfectly metrical. It occurs in the description of the *Mater Suspiriorum*, in that number of the *Suspiria*, entitled, "Our Ladies of Sorrow": "And her eyes, if they were seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle ; no man could read their story, they would be found *filled with perishing dreams and with wrecks of forgotten delirium.*"

That De Quincey did not strive after this metrical effect is certain ; it is even probable that he was not aware of it. His remarks on his own contributions to impassioned prose show that he was conscious of being in some respects a pioneer, an innovator ; but his innovations—if they really were such—were displayed simply in choice and arrangement of word and phrase, and for the great traditions of prose *structure* he seems to have maintained a profound and un-

wavering respect. It would be too much to say that there are not fine passages of musical prose in which we fail to discover a single phrase that is really metrical, and in these passages the proseman achieves some of his greatest triumphs. Such, for example, is the singularly beautiful opening sentence of the article on Cardinal Newman, which appeared in *The Spectator* immediately after the death of that distinguished man—an article now published among the later essays of Mr R. H. Hutton—"There are deaths yet to come which will agitate the public mind more than Cardinal Newman's; but there has been none, and will be none, so far as we know, that will leave the world that really knew him with so keen a sense of deprivation, of a white star extinguished, of a sign vanished, of an age impoverished, of a grace withdrawn."

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II, 2

This is dignified, imaginative, and musical; but its music is compact of harmonies rather than melodies, and it does not anywhere lend itself to scansion as does the melody of verse. Still, it remains true that, as a rule, whenever prose is, if one may so put it, produced in the poetical mood—the mood, that is, of impassioned imagination—some hint of the metrical utterance of verse will be here or there discernible. The difference between poetical prose and the bastard form which is sometimes called "prose poetry," lies

in the fact that in the former the metrical movement is a *mere* hint, an allusive *nuance*, which is felt only in the general effect, while in the latter it is a gross suggestion, an obtrusive trick, which ill-manneredly draws and fixes attention upon itself. This distinction should be remembered, for when it is forgotten, prose is artificially and gratuitously impoverished by loss of the natural swing and bound of highly vitalised movement.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

It was nearly thirty-five years ago—finer exactitude of computation is at the moment impossible—that the present writer, then a lad in his teens, read what he believes to have been one of the first references made on an English page to the most characteristic work of Oliver Wendell Holmes. This special page was found in a number of the long-deceased *Fraser's Magazine*, and the writer was that "Country Parson," as he afterwards styled himself, who was then known only by his four initials. It was in the course of one of A. K. H. B.'s genial gossips "concerning" something or other that he let fall an *obiter dictum* which must have astonished and bewildered many of his readers in the early sixties. The utterance was not a paradox of opinion, though perhaps it might seem to involve one: it was a simple expression of personal feeling, for the essayist was bold enough to declare that he would rather have written "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" than all the poems of Shelley put together.

Now this was courageous to the point of temerity,

for though there were doubtless many, even among the readers of *Fraser*, who could not have stood an examination in the poems of Shelley, they all knew them to be of classical rank ; and this airy depreciation of them in favour of an almost unknown book must have seemed little less than an impertinence. Even those who in those early days had discovered the Autocrat, and gloried in the discovery, may have thought the implied comparison inept to the verge of banality ; for the two writers clearly stood upon such different planes that thus to set them over against each other seemed hardly less ridiculous than to bring the "Elements of Geometry" into rivalry with "Paradise Lost." And yet, on thinking the matter over, one sees that the Country Parson was not so far astray as he seemed to be ; that the names cited represented not individual books, but literary tribes or families ; and that the writer was merely stating a natural and largely shared preference for one of the two classes into which all worthy literature can be divided.

There are those authors whose work commands admiration for its power, or eloquence, or grace, or grandeur, or for a combination of these or other qualities in some splendid synthesis of genius, without ever for a moment making an emotional appeal on behalf of the personality behind it. The noble

numbers of "Lycidas" do not make one yearn to have been a house-mate of Milton; the biting wit of "A Tale of a Tub" inspires no regret for the impossibility of hobnobbing with Swift; and it is very difficult to enter into the feelings of Mrs Blimber, who, it will be remembered, was wont to declare that if she could have known Cicero she could have died contented. On the other hand, there are writers whose books, dear as they are in themselves—as simple literature and nothing more—are dearer still in virtue of the human individuality which they constantly and delightfully reveal. They are books the pages of which are not mere paper and ink: they pulsate with human heart-throbs; they shake with human laughter; they are wet and salt with human tears. Various writers of the English-speaking races have, during this century, given us books like these, but two stand out in conspicuous winningness from the little throng. The name of one is Charles Lamb; the name of the other is Oliver Wendell Holmes.

It is the habit of these delightful writers to take the world very largely into their confidence, to be not merely implicitly but explicitly autobiographical. This was especially so in the case of the Autocrat. Were external records wanting, it would be possible to compile from the "Breakfast-Table" and "Tea-cups"

papers, from the occasional poems, and from the pleasant pages of "Our Hundred Days in Europe," a genuine biography which, howsoever defective in mere details of event, would be intimately true to the essential facts of experience. Who does not remember, as among the pleasantest passages of these pleasant books, the pictures of the "gambrel-roofed" house at Cambridge where the boy Oliver, in visitations of sense and outgoings of imagination, grew to realisation of himself and the wonderful world outside; of the visits to Boston harbour, and the tarry smell that carried on into manhood suggestions of the mystery of the illimitable sea; of traditional simplicities of Massachusetts life in the youth of a century that now is old; of the meetings of college-friends, first gay and boisterous, then growing more and more pensive as one by one the chairs emptied; of days' in the eastern hemisphere when the young old man full of years confesses to a human delight in finding himself also rich in honours, even though something has gone from his life, and he can no longer see or hear the skylark as it rises in carol from Salisbury Plain? They are beautiful and significant pictures—pictures which tell so much that, save of bare arid fact, they leave little to be told.

Apart from the mere literary quality of Holmes's work—its quality, I mean, as a simple vehicle of ex-

pression—it seems to me that its pre-eminent charm, the charm that wins a warmer tribute than intellectual admiration, is that human element of which I have been speaking. Elizabeth Barrett, writing of the “Pomegranates” of the great poet who was afterwards to be her husband, spoke of them as fruit which, when

“cut deep down the middle
Shows a heart within, blood-tinctured, of a veined
humanity,”

and it would be difficult to find a better brief description of the most characteristic utterances, both in prose and verse, of Oliver Wendell Holmes. He always speaks *from* what is most human in himself, *to* what is most human in his auditors. “The arguments that they could not meet,” writes he of certain controversialists, “were two—the blood in men’s veins, and the milk in women’s breasts”; and it is to these arguments that he himself makes constant and eager appeal. In expressing his own individuality he glorifies the individuality of others, for he dwells most lovingly on the common everyday elements of human nature in which all men realise their kinship. In the person of the young astronomer in “The Poet at the Breakfast-Table” he writes—

“Had I been asked before I left my bed
Of shapeless dust what clothing I would wear,
I would have said, More angel and less worm;

But for their sake who are even such as I,
Of the same mingled blood, I would not choose
To hate that meaner portion of myself
That makes me brother to the least of men."

In form these lines are not specially characteristic; in substance they are eminently so. The Autocrat is always on the outlook for the common ground, the *modus vivendi*: even if human nature is warped and twisted, he will do his best to enter into loving comprehension of the warps and twists—to realise that they might have been his own in a less happy environment. The miser, for example, is perhaps among the least likeable of human beings, but the Poet in his ninth talk has a passage which so humanises him, that he really becomes one of ourselves. And thus it is always. It is impossible to resist this perennial outflow of sympathy: it is—to use a somewhat Irish form of expression—still more impossible to resist the implicit demand for sympathy in return. "I don't want you to believe anything I say; I only want you to try to see what makes me believe it." Was there ever a more frankly human utterance than that?

The student of Oliver Wendell Holmes who wishes to work his way from the circumference to the centre should begin at the tales, go on through the poems, and finish among the breakfast and tea

cups. This, at any rate, is the most systematic way of proceeding, and the "students' manuals" of my youth were strong upon system; but, after all, any other way will do just as well. Still, if one adopts this particular way, one finds—to use another Hibernicism—that there is at the circumference a great deal of the centre. "A Mortal Antipathy" is not, I think, of any great importance; but no reader of "Elsie Venner" and "The Guardian Angel" will need to ask himself wonderingly, "Now, what was the kind of man who wrote these books?" We feel that he is a ~~man whose~~ temperament makes him intensely interested in human nature, and whose bent of mind gives him a special interest in any development of human nature which, by exhibiting exceptional possibilities or limitations, casts some strange side-light upon its more ordinary and normal conditions. Thus the prenatally poisoned brain of "Elsie Venner" is not an object of morbid interest in itself, like the monstrosity at a village show; it is simply a means to the statement of that problem of organisation and responsibility which in some form or other presents itself in every life, just in the same way that the strangely fascinating figure of Myrtle Hazard helps him to a presentment of the kindred problem of personality and heredity. •

"Medicated novels," an old lady friend of the

author's called them; and so undoubtedly they are, but the medication is but a condiment which accentuates rather than disguises the fine human flavour. Indeed, it is very easy—the superficial critic has found it fatally so—to over-emphasise the old lady's epithet. Elsie and Myrtle attract us most strongly not by what is strange in their natures, but by what is familiar; indeed, it may be said of the strange that it is only the familiar “writ large,” so that he who runs may read. As a matter of fact, in both the books, especially in “The Guardian Angel,” the abnormal element gains conspicuousness by isolation. It is doubtless true that in the conception of Myrtle Hazard the moral issues of the problem of heredity are embodied with an exceptional sharpness in the angles of presentation; but even Myrtle is not always a mere ancestral *avatar*, and Byles Gridley, Gifted Hopkins, Clement Lindsay, and Susan Posey represent perfectly normal and, in one or two instances, even commonplace types. Never, for example, was there a more humorously truthful or more truthfully humorous study of that frequent combination of ignorant fluency and irritable vanity which thinks itself genius, than the portrait of Gifted Hopkins, “the bard of Oxbow village”; and yet, though there is hardly a sentence about the pretentious young goose in which a laugh does not lurk behind the words, we

are never allowed to have for him a feeling which is not at heart friendly. Even the venomous Cynthia Badlam is humanised by the yearnings of motherhood, and Murray Bradshaw, the scoundrel, is allowed to commend himself to not unkindly memories by an heroic death. Oliver Wendell Holmes was surely one of those who might have rightly claimed as his own the words dictated by Abou Ben Adhem to the Angel of Judgment—

“Write me as one who loves his fellow men.”

Discussion of the deeper purpose of the two stories is obviously impossible in a paragraph, and brief comment is likely enough to be misleading; but it may just be noted that the intellectual assumption involved in the narratives is really much less startling and revolutionary than some people have supposed it to be. It is simply the assumption to which Christianity and common-sense alike bear testimony, that the sphere of moral responsibility is widened or narrowed by opportunity or obstacle; and so far from devitalising our conceptions of moral freedom, even in the most sorely tried, it emphasises and intensifies them by showing us how the woman in “Elsie Venner” finally crushes the head of the serpent, and how Myrtle Hazard’s own proper human individuality routs in deadly conflict the alien personalities which

would hurl it from its throne. The man or woman who would lead a moral forlorn hope will find in "Elsie Venner" and "The Guardian Angel" not discouragement but inspiration.

The foregoing sentences are, however, a mere parenthesis—a little pool which the shallow stream of comment fills as it passes, and then hurries on. If, as has been said, the main charm of Holmes's books is their charm of self-expression, we take a step towards the centre in passing from the tales to the poems, for the simple reason that in the latter the self-portraiture is inevitably more explicit. From this point of view the purely humorous poems which have nothing but a laugh behind them, and appeal to nothing but a laugh in front, count for less than the others; but still they count for something, because a man's moments of gaiety are as a rule his most unguarded moments—the moments in which the mask, if there be a mask, drops off. And it is to be noted that Holmes's laughter is never the laughter of scorn, or cynicism, or ribaldry, or fatuity, but of simple light-heartedness—the light-heartedness we often see in a happy child, but more seldom in the cheerfulest and healthiest man. Sometimes it is the gaiety which can utter itself in a simple verbal quip, such as

"Long metre answers for a common song,
Though common metre does not answer long;"

or the delightful first stanza of the poem read at the meeting of the Harvard Alumni in 1857 :

I thank you, Mr President, you've kindly broke the ice ;
Virtue should always be the first,—I'm only SECOND VICE—
(A vice is something with a screw that's made to hold its
 jaw
Till some old file has played away upon an ancient saw)."

Sometimes it demands embodiment in a more concrete ludicrous conception, as in "The Height of the Ridiculous," or in an elaborate intellectual whimsicality such as "The Deacon's Masterpiece, or the Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" ; but it is oftenest found not in its pure form as virgin gaiety, but in an amalgam of humour, pathos, sentiment, and reflection which appeals to us not in one but in every mood. Such is it in that early poem "The Last Leaf," the grace and tenderness of which were unsurpassed even by the Autocrat and Professor of later years. The old man totters down the street in the afternoon sunshine in a world that has grown lonely ; for

"The mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has prest
 In their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
 On the tomb."

That was the stanza—with its pathetic suggestions of love and loss, and regret and yearning—which went home to the heart of Abraham Lincoln, and became his favourite, though indeed it is difficult to choose favourites among the tender humanities of Oliver Wendell Holmes's verse, because he appeals with equal subtlety of sympathy to so many varied sensibilities. For myself, I think, I am behind no one in love for "The Chambered Nautilus," with its body of fine fancy and its grandly imaginative close; for "Iris, her Book," in which a girl's heart is embalmed; for "Home-sick in Heaven," with its far-reaching humanity of imagination; or for the tender farewell strains of "The Iron Gate"; but I have always felt a special delight in a little poem which has the look of being a simple transcript from memory, and which is—as poetry—less important than any one of these beautiful things. It is "The Opening of the Piano"—the inauguration of the musical treasure which has come over sea to the gambrel-roofed house. The good mother knows how best to still the tumult of glee—

"So Mary, the household minstrel, who always loved to
please,
Sat down to the new Clementi, and struck the glittering
keys.

Hushed were the children's voices, and every eye grew
dim,

As, floating from lip and finger, arose the 'Vesper
Hymn.'

"— Catherine, child of a neighbour, curly and rosy-red
(Wedded since, and a widow,—something like ten years
dead),

Hearing a gush of music, such as none before,
Steals from her mother's chamber, and peeps at the open
door.

"Just as the 'Jubilate' in threaded whisper dies,
'Open it! open it, lady!' the little maiden cries,
(For she thought 'twas a singing creature caged in a box
she heard),
'Open it! open it, lady! and let me see the bird!'"

But, after all, Oliver Wendell Holmes is what
he is to us in virtue of one little group of books.
Though his stories and his verses are delightful, he
is but *a* novelist among novelists, *a* poet among
poets, whereas he is *the* Autocrat, and his sway is
wider as well as more beneficent than his—poor
fellow!—of All the Russias. It is not easy to dis-
tinguish between the charm of substance and the
charm of form in the breakfast-table and tea-
table books; and if it were easy, it would be profit-
less, for form and substance have acted as acid and

alkali in the production of a new salt of letters. That such a new thing should wait for a nineteenth-century discoverer was, before the fact, well-nigh incredible, but it is the incredible that always happens. Since the days of the "Book of Job" and the long subsequent "Dialogues" of Plato, the "conversation" has been a literary form, and the pure "monologue" has a hardly less ancient lineage; but the monologue, brightened, varied, and vivified by conversational breaks, was an inspiration of the late year 1857. And what a vehicle it is—quite unique in its pliancy, its absorbency, its adequacy, its instancy of response to every demand than can possibly be made upon it! One cannot imagine the utterance for which the Autocrat could not find room and fitting place in these hold-all colloquies. Was there a fancy quaint enough to deserve a record but too whimsical for him to father; was there some rough-and-ready Philistinism that must be set down in order that it might have the life more effectually crushed out of it; was there some subtle refinement which must have its due yet not be allowed to confuse the main thought?—there was "The young man John," or "The Schoolmistress," or "The Little Gentleman," or "The Model of all the Virtues," or "The Master," or "The Scarabee," waiting and willing to be its sponsor. Were there a

theme demanding graver or more consecutive or more symmetrical treatment than that of familiar talk, what more natural than that the Autocrat or the Professor should read to his fellow-boarders an essay or a poem or such a transcript from life as the delightful reminiscence of "The Gambrel-roofed House"? The books are like an American surprise party; the guests, though welcome, are unexpected, and no one knows beforehand what benefaction is borne by each of them. And when the gifts are all laid upon the table, how attractive are the items in the varied and generous pile! There is something for everybody—for the lover and the poet, the mystic and the man of the world—for the reader who enjoys a jest, and for that other reader who goes out to meet some thought which touches the heart of things unseen.

The Autocrat's friend Motley wrote of him, "I hardly know an author in any language to be paralleled with him for profound and suggestive thought, glittering wit, vivid imagination, and individuality of humour." This is the language of intellectual appreciation warmed in the flame of personal affection; but there is only one word which is possibly overcharged—the word "profound." The profound thinkers are few and, of necessity, lonely. Holmes loved to be in the

crowd, and to feel himself one with it. But if his thought was not profound, it was saved from superficiality by his marvellous intellectual alertness and penetratively imaginative sympathy. It may not sink shafts to the centre, but it upturns the subsoil of thought and emotion, and reveals to us buried treasures of humanity—gold coins, and silver vases embossed with story, and shapes of beauty from the wheel of the Great Potter. The books of the Autocrat are books to live with; books to make friends of; books of which we never tire, because they have something for every mood, and which we must go to in every mood before we can know them for what they are. They remind us of the Autocrat's own remarks about poetry. He says—

“Now I tell you a poem must be kept *and used*, like a meerschaum or a violin. A poem is just as porous as the meerschaum—the more porous it is the better. I mean to say that a genuine poem is capable of absorbing an indefinite amount of our own humanity—its tenderness, its heroism, its regrets, its aspirations, so as to be gradually stained through with a divine secondary colour derived from ourselves. So you see it must take time to bring the sentiment of a poem into harmony with our nature by staining ourselves through every thought and image our being can penetrate.”

Often does a writer of criticism fumble miserably among clumsy phrases which he knows to be ill-fitting

and inadequate for the one perfect word, which would be more than worth them all. And here surely it is! If one says of the recorded colloquies "At the Breakfast-Table" and "Over the Tea-cups" that they are pre-eminently *porous* books, the praise will seem niggardly only to the dull. One may be sure that no praise would have been dearer to the Autocrat himself.

THE CHARM OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

It may, I suppose, be taken for granted that a library composed entirely of books belonging to any one class of literature will as a rule prove attractive only to the specialist student. The classical library appeals to the scholar, the theological library to the cleric, the medical library to the physician; and though in every one of them the catholic-minded Lamb-like reader might find something to suit him, he would soon be depressed by the terrible monotony. I myself have been in my time a mighty novel-reader; but were I shut up for a month in a room where fiction was my only fare, I should feel that its walls did indeed a prison make. As for the libraries of the people who call themselves "book-lovers," probably in order that they may be distinguished from the tribe of book-readers—the collectors who gather together first editions, large paper copies, Elzevirs, black-letter folios, Caxtons, and all the miscellaneous "curios" and rarities of the

world of books—their value in their owners' eyes is largely due to the fact that the common herd is unable to discern in them any value at all; and can only "wonder with a foolish face" of bewilderment when told that a small shelf of musty-looking tomes, which recall the fourpenny box, is worth as much as the house that shelters it.

Still there is no reason why, if a man will only set his wits to work, he should not be able to gratify the instinct of the specialist collector in forming a library which would be of some interest to the intelligent Philistine, as well as to the member of his own little tribe of connoisseurs. He might, for example, begin the formation of a collection of Autobiographies, for not only is autobiographical literature sufficiently extensive to provide him with occupation for a lifetime, but it comprises works which are sufficiently rare to stimulate the appetite of the book-hunter; and as the collection grew he might make the startling discovery that he had become possessed of books that tempted him not only to look at them, to handle them, and proudly to exhibit them, but actually to read them as well.

Indeed, a man of ordinary intelligence who did not feel the fascination of a chamber lined from floor to ceiling with the stories of the lives of men and women, told by the only persons who could tell them

with absolute truthfulness, must be in some way an abnormal creature. To the average human being human nature is the one supremely interesting thing—witness the universality of the passion for fiction, drama, and personal gossip; and the autobiography is of human nature all compact. “I have remarked,” says Carlyle, in the opening chapter of his “Life of John Sterling,” “that a true delineation of the smallest man, and his scene of pilgrimage through life, is capable of interesting the greatest man; that all men are to an unspeakable degree brothers, each man’s life a strange emblem of every man’s; and that Human Portraits, faithfully drawn, are of all pictures the welcomest on human walls.”

If this be true of biography, which is, after all, a view of the house of life from the outside, with here and there, perhaps, some details supplied by surreptitious peeps through window or keyhole, it must be more inclusively true of autobiography, in which we are taken by the hand and made free of the inner chambers. An absolutely unreserved and sincere record of the deeds, words, thoughts, and emotions which have gone to make up the most commonplace life, would be of priceless value in many ways, but most of all, perhaps, would it be valuable in relieving every one who read it of at least a part of that burden of isolation which most people carry with them all

their lives. Nearly everybody, certainly every young person, is fully convinced that some of his experiences are peculiar to himself; and because of this conviction he dare not disclose them, lest he should subject himself to certain misunderstanding and probable reprobation. Then, in some fortunate moment, he takes up the ideal autobiography, the volume in which some other man has disclosed the secrets of his soul, and he finds that what he has supposed to be his own peculiar property or his own peculiar torment, is the property or the torment of this other man as well; and if of him, why not of a hundred, of a thousand men—of the greater number of the race? Loneliness must always be more or less terrible to a being with a social nature that craves for companionship; and a book which relieves our loneliness by assuring us that what we had mistaken as a sign of alienation from our fellows is really a sign of kinship with them, is a book which enriches our life by giving us a new feeling of being at home in the world.

Once, and once only, during the course of Emerson's last visit to England, he and George Eliot met in London at the house of a common friend. Unfortunately, no Boswell or Eckermann was near, and of what could not fail to be an intensely interesting conversation only one fragment

has been preserved. The sage of Concord asked the great English novelist what was her favourite book—not, one would think, a question to which an omnivorous reader like George Eliot would find it easy to give an instantaneous reply. Nevertheless, the reply was ready: without a moment's hesitation she named the "Confessions of Rousseau"; and Emerson's serene face brightened as he said, "Why, that is my favourite too!" It seems, at first sight, one of the most curious and inexplicable of coincidences that out of the whole world of books with which both interlocutors were so widely familiar, each should have selected this book as the object of special and peculiar favour. But there is not really anything curious or inexplicable about it: the interchange of identical sentiments was simply a putting into concrete form of the general feeling that no knowledge can possibly be more interesting or fascinating than the knowledge of those inner facts of human nature from which the veil is so seldom lifted.

Probably, indeed, no one, or hardly any one, doubts that an absolutely sincere and unreserved autobiography would be a uniquely attractive and valuable book; but many people may doubt whether even an approximation to such sincerity and unreserve has ever been made. Even a biographer, it may be

said, is apt to fall in love with his subject, and his hero-worship will tempt him to heighten all the lights and soften all the shadows in the hero's portrait ; but his temptation is nothing to that of the autobiographer, for the good reputation of *his* hero is of more consequence to him than is that of any other man in the world ; and to expect him voluntarily to reveal that which would expose him to execration or contempt is simply to expect a moral impossibility.

But if anything like a minute revelation of a man's life through a biographical medium be neither generally attainable nor even desirable, it does not follow that the impression left by a man's self-painted portrait, the record of his life from his own point of view, must necessarily leave an unveracious impression behind it. What David said in his haste no man who is not an inveterate cynic will repeat at his leisure. The man who sits down to write his own biography is not likely to be less truthful than his neighbours ; and he is probably incited to his task by the reflection that an accurate record of his career, written by the one man to whom absolute accuracy is possible, will redound to his honour. The parenthetical clause in the last sentence is important. Whether a man *will* tell the whole truth about himself may be questionable ; but it is unquestionable that he is the only person who knows it and *can* tell

it. Many a word or action which, as recorded by the best-informed biographer—who necessarily writes from the outside—seems perfectly inexplicable, would, in the pages of an autobiography, lose its mystery by revealing itself in its relation to some obscure side of the writer's character; and even if his explanation were not in itself satisfactory, it could not fail to supply invaluable materials for an explanation of our own. We may even suspect that it is not the true explanation; but the mere fact that the autobiographer wishes us to accept it as true is a real help to an understanding of his character and motives.

As a matter of fact, the secrets of personality cannot be kept, and a man's nature betrays itself without his knowledge of the betrayal. The truth is suggested by words from which truth is absent; the writer, though consciously false, reveals himself unconsciously; and if we lose the real man at one point, we catch him at another. Perhaps we are more likely to catch him in autobiography than in any other form of written utterance. There is occasionally something intoxicating in the act of writing about one's self. There is no surer means of knowing a man than getting him to talk about something in which he is supremely interested, and the autobiographer has a theme which is absorbing

enough to carry him out of himself, and make him forget all his favourite tricks and affectations and reserves.

Oddly enough, there seems to be some self-revealing magic in the mere use of the first personal pronoun, even by a writer who does not intend to make any confession. The novelist who adopts the autobiographical form often seems to be so dominated by the form that he unconsciously produces a story which is autobiographical in substance also. Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens each wrote one novel in which the principal character—the heroine in one case, the hero in another—is also the narrator; and “*Jane Eyre*” and “*David Copperfield*” are the most intensely and recognisably *personal* books which their authors have left behind them. Dickens was doubtless well aware what he was about, for a man cannot tell the story of his youth without being conscious of the fact; but “*Jane Eyre*” proves conclusively that a woman can paint her own portrait and never recognise a likeness obvious to all the world. In answer to a statement that in her famous heroine she had represented herself, Charlotte Brontë declared that Jane was like her “only in being little and plain.” That she believed what she said is certain; and it is equally certain that she never made a more egregious mistake. The pictures of Charlotte

Brontë, painted by Mrs Gaskell and Mr Augustine Birrell, are so good that, by their help, we are enabled to see that the picture of Rochester's governess has more of intimate and interpretative *vraisemblance* than either of them. Shirley was "she," Lucy Snowe was "she," but Jane Eyre was "I"; and the pronoun had such potency that, all unwittingly to herself, the features of the real "I" were traced one by one on the tiny scraps of paper.

There are probably some very sensible people by whom this last speculation will be scouted as fanciful. Let it be so: perhaps that is the beauty of it. If we could never be fanciful, life would not be worth living; but whatever amount of fancy there may be in this or that speculation about autobiography, the charm of autobiography itself is a solid and a delightful fact. The hypothetical collection pleaded for on an earlier page would be a treasure-house of humour and pathos, of adventure and meditation, of jubilant boast and penitent confession, of splendid, strange, or grotesque curiosities of life from the well-trodden highways and the obscure byways of human experience. It has been said that the best books are the books which take us into the best company; but, then, men's opinions concerning good company are perplexingly mixed. One thing, however, may be

said with more of emphatic dogmatism than is generally allowable, that if a man cannot find pleasure in the companionship of a devout saint like Augustine, or a vivacious scamp like Cellini ; a sentimentalist like Rousseau, or a matter-of-fact man like Cobbett ; a pushing bookseller like Lackington, or a gentle book-writer like Leigh Hunt ; a dreaming De Quincey, or a wide-awake Franklin ; a philosophical aristocrat like Lord Herbert of Cherbury, or a pleasantly egotistic shepherd like James Hogg—if, having a taste for theology, he has no delight in John Bunyan, George Fox, Francis William Newman, or his more illustrious brother, or, being a lover of feminine society, is blind to the varied attractions of Madame D'Arblay, Harriet Martineau, or Mary Howitt—he may be given up at once as a hopelessly unsocial person, fit only for an uninhabited circle—though, unfortunately, there is none—in Dante's "Inferno."

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MUSIC AND FORM.

MANY persons have heard of, and more than a few have seen, the remarkable and beautiful "voice figures" produced by Mrs Watts Hughes of the well-known Islington Home for Little Boys. Those who have not seen the figures themselves may have read an article contributed by Mrs Watts Hughes in 1891 to the *Century Magazine*, or to a little *brochure* from her pen, published separately, with an introduction by Mr Walter Besant, during the same year, both adorned with pictorial reproductions of the strangely-formed designs. The method of producing the figures, though partially anticipated by certain experiments made by Chladni in the last century and by Professor Sedley Taylor in our own day, is Mrs Watts Hughes's own discovery, and it is exceedingly simple. On a thin indiarubber membrane, stretched across the bottom of a tube of sufficient diameter for the purpose, is poured a small quantity of water, or some denser liquid, such as glycerine, and into this liquid are

sprinkled a few grains of some ordinary solid pigment. A note of music is then sung down the tube by Mrs Watts Hughes, and immediately the atoms of suspended pigment arrange themselves in definite and calculable forms, many of which bear a curious resemblance to some of the most beautiful objects in nature—flowers, shells, or trees. After the note has ceased to sound the forms remain, and the illustrations of the pamphlet and the *Century* article show how wonderfully accurate is the lovely mimicry of the image-making music.

Mrs Watts Hughes's "voice-figures" are, however, interesting not merely as curiosities, or even as things of beauty, but as suggestions that the relations between sound and form may be more intricate and intimate than has heretofore been supposed, even by the most careful and enterprising investigators. "I must say," writes the experimenter herself, "that as day by day I have gone on singing into shape these peculiar forms, and, stepping out of doors, have seen their parallels living in the flowers, ferns, and trees around me; and again, as I have watched the little heaps in the formation of the floral figures gather themselves up and then shoot out their petals, just as a flower springs from the swollen bud—the hope has come to me that these humble experiments may afford some suggestions in regard to Nature's

production of her own beautiful forms, and may thereby aid in some slight degree the revelation of another link in the great chain of the organised universe that, we are told in Holy Writ, took *its* shape at the voice of God." There is nothing in this hope which is unreasonable or fantastic; but the voice-figures are not less suggestive from another point of view, inasmuch as they seem to provide one more instance of the many fulfilments by scientific discovery of what may be called the prophecies of poetry,—those utterances in which the poets have seemed impelled to assign to the short-lived harmonies and melodies of music the permanence of material form.

Perhaps the most striking of these utterances is to be found in Browning's noble "Abt Vogler." The musician who speaks has been improvising upon his instrument, and the last notes die away, apparently into an abyss of nothingness, from which they can never be recalled. The emotion of the moment, in which triumph fades into sadness, expresses itself in a soliloquy which, beginning in a sad minor key, rises into a confident pæan of exultant assurance. Why, he asks, should not his brave structure of music have the tangible permanence of that palace which rose into being as Solomon named the ineffable Name?—

“ Would it might tarry like his, this beautiful building of mine,

 This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise !

Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,

 Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise.”

But it will not stay ; even as he speaks it is gone ; and “ the good tears start ” for the creation of beauty that has been, and will be no more for ever,—the lovely structure of sound which, while it lasted, had such an impressive reality that he “ scarce can say that he feared, that he even gave it a thought, that the gone thing was to go.” And yet, can it be ? The soul of the musician rises in revolt, and affirms the eternity which the sense denies. He turns to God, builder and maker of houses not made with hands, and joy is born again of the glad confidence that, so long as God lives, “ there shall never be one lost good, what was shall live as before,” that—

“ All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist,

 Not its semblance, but itself ; no beauty, nor good, nor power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist,

 When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.”

This thought of some soul of permanence behind the apparent transience of musical sound has again and again found utterance. It provided a motive for Miss Procter's lyric, "The Lost Chord"; it is hinted at in that passage in the "Idylls of the King" where the Seer, speaking to young Gareth and his companions of the magical city of Camelot, says—

"For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King
 And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;
 They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
 Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
 And built it to the music of their harps.

 For an ye heard a music, like enow
 They are building still, seeing the city is built
 To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever."

The thought is expressed once more with lofty eloquence in Cardinal Newman's great Oxford sermon on "The Theory of Development in Christian Doctrine." The preacher said—

"Take another example of an outward and earthly form or economy, under which great wonders unknown seem to be typified—I mean musical sounds, as they are exhibited most perfectly in instrumental harmony. There are seven notes in the scale; make them fourteen; yet what a slender outfit for so vast an enterprise! What science brings so much out of so little? Out of what poor elements does

some great master create his new world! Shall we say that all this exuberant inventiveness is a mere ingenuity or trick of art, like some fashion of the day, without reality, without meaning? . . . Is it possible that that inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regulated, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes? Can it be that those mysterious stirrings of heart, and keen emotions, and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, should be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so! It cannot be."

Nothing surely could well be plainer than that Mr Browning, Miss Procter, Lord Tennyson, and Cardinal Newman have, to say the least, felt the imaginative attractiveness of the thought that there is in music a permanent element—a something which does not pass when the sounds cease to vibrate upon the tympanum, but which endures for ever.

Nor can it, I think, be considered a merely fanciful speculation to regard these voice-figures, which reveal musical sounds in an apprehensible embodiment of form, as an indication of the reality and nature of this permanence. If, in certain artificially provided conditions, music manifests itself as form, is not this a hint that form—which demands a certain substantiality—must be of its very essence? The

word "substantiality" has, indeed, too much materialism of suggestion to be perfectly satisfactory, but no better word is available. Form, as an attribute of substance, is apprehended most surely by the sense of touch; and the wave-theories of sound and light demonstrate what had long been tentatively believed without demonstration—that of this sense our senses of hearing and seeing are but finer and subtler manifestations. The accredited facts surely confer something of obviousness upon the inference that because the finer tact of hearing is, in essence, one with the grosser sensibility to which we give the name of touch, the objects apprehended by the former—not less than those apprehended by the latter—have probably a real substance and therefore a real form.

Indeed, we have all had sensible experiences of the fundamental oneness of hearing and feeling, which must have suggested to many a similar identity of the causes producing the diverse but allied sensations. When an artillery review is going on we can not only hear the cannonade, but feel the quiver of the glass in the window; if we approach a church in which the organ is being played, we are often conscious of the trembling of the ground some instants before the wave of pure sound breaks upon the sense of hearing. Beethoven, after becoming perfectly deaf, retained some strange physical susceptibility

which apprised him of the fact that music was being performed, and I have heard of an old gentleman, whose deafness was as absolute as that of the great composer, but who was able—if the word may be allowed—to “hear” perfectly the music of a piano-forte against the outside case of which he pressed the palm of his hand. If, then, music be apprehended by a subtle sense of touch—that sense by means of which we know the forms and boundaries of things—there is nothing inherently irrational in the thought that musical combinations may have forms and boundaries of their own which, though now inapprehensible to us, would at once be made apprehensible by perhaps a very slight extension of the gamut of natural sensation. The sea-waves leave upon the beach a sharply-outlined tide-mark; must not the waves of harmony and melody leave as clear and sharp an outline on the shore of ether over which they roll? To speak of the “shape” of a symphony or a sonata sounds fantastic; but may not such speech be merely a crude and necessarily inadequate of a dimly discerned truth?

And if this be so, may it not also be that the strains which present themselves to our hearing as *sound*, may, to more finely endowed natures—natures embodying our vague conception of angelic existence—present itself as *vision* of substantial realities? If

the notes produced by Mrs Watts Hughes suffice to group her floating pigments into shapes of "weird caverns at the bottom of the sea, full of beautifully-coloured sea-anemones and mussel-shells, headless snakes, and fairy cups, and mossy entanglements of bud and leaf-like form," the imagination does not find it impossible to accept the belief that the congregated harmonies of Handel and Beethoven and Wagner live as forms of splendour—as lofty mountain summits, as towered and templed cities, as great expanses of luxurious forest—in the vision of clearer eyes than ours ; and that when the last chord of Abt Vogler's improvisation seemed to die upon the air, he had really put the top-stone upon a palace as beautiful and enduring as that raised by the magic of Solomon.

THE BURDEN OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

For those who love letters so well that even its mere chronology has for them no barren aridity, there are certain years to which are assigned specially honourable places in the chambers of memory; and 1862 has a double claim to such honour, for it witnessed the publication of the "Last Poems" of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and of the first really representative work of Christina Rossetti. When the latter poet was but sixteen, a little collection of her girlish verse had been proudly though privately printed by her maternal grandfather, Mr Polidori, and in 1850 her pen-name, "Ellen Alleyn," had appeared as the signature of seven youthful poems published in *The Germ*; but the slim volume containing "Goblin Market" and its lyrical companions was the first revelation to the world of the matured powers of the new singer, and to those who had ears to hear, the little book came as a welcome assurance that, though one rich penetrating strain was silenced, a

woman's voice not less strong and tender, and with a new, strange quality of charm, was still to be heard in the Victorian choir.

It is probable, however, that few of Miss Rossetti's earliest readers and critics fully recognised the importance of the new contribution to English poetry. Its grace, sweetness, purity, and tenderness could not well be missed, and there was a certain obviously natural quaintness which gave to many of the poems a haunting, exotic charm; but at this early day, there seems to have been but scant discernment of that simple directness of imaginative vision and that power of rendering by one set of symbols truths of the material and of the spiritual worlds, which gave to these first poems, not less truly than to the poems which have succeeded them, their power of subtle fascination. For it must be noted in passing that Miss Rossetti is not one of the many poets whose works represent successive stages of an intellectual or artistic development, and can therefore only be studied with full appreciation in the order of their production. Of course, it was impossible that thirty years of the life of any earnest worker should come and go and leave no result of gain behind them; but in Miss Rossetti's case it was simply the inevitable gain of facility and finish, for in all essential qualities of vision and the rendering of it her earliest work

is as characteristically opulent as any of the work that succeeded it.

Of various elusive impressions left upon the reader's emotional consciousness by Miss Rossetti's poems, the one which finally achieves supremacy both of distinctness and permanence can only be described with apparent paradox as an impression of familiar remoteness. Wordsworth, in his most frequently quoted line, has spoken of the imaginative vision to which all objects appear in "the light that never was on sea or land," and the true magical quality of this light is best discerned, not when it flames on Shelley's mountain peaks, or pierces with lurid illumination the recesses of Milton's Pandemonium, but when, as in this more human poet's pages, it falls on homely figures and homely scenes, and confers upon them a strange and beautiful transfiguration like that which is wrought by moonlight or by dream. It shines even in such comparatively unimportant poems as "Maiden Song," "Maggie, a Lady," and "Noble Sisters," which have much of the form and all the spirit of the old ballads—that spirit which charms and soothes us, because where it reigns the weary complexities and sophistications of our confused thought and business can find no place, and the primitive simplicities of action and emotion live their own glad unconscious life.

“ Long ago and long ago,
And long ago still,
There dwelt three merry maidens,
Upon a distant hill.
One was tall Meggan,
And one was dainty May,
But one was fair Margaret,
More fair than I can say—
Long ago and long ago.”

The song itself, as well as the maidens, seems to come to us from an immemorial long ago. How sweet, fresh, and unstrained are its notes, but to-day how few can sing them! Many are the strivers after that simplicity which in an artificial age serves as well as anything else to gratify the lust for change; but the true simplicity comes not by seeking; it is a grace of instinct that is given, not won, and in our century it has been given to but two singers—to William Blake and Christina Rossetti.

But it is elsewhere than in these simple ballad verses that the strange light gleams with spiritual, rather than merely natural, magic. In the larger body of Miss Rossetti's poetry the familiar things of sense win their special quality of fascination from an atmosphere of spiritual suggestion by which they are surrounded and permeated. In thus making us conscious of two worlds at once, Miss Rossetti does not use the mechanical method of the allegorist, who

chooses a set of arbitrary symbols, and labels each with its special spiritual significance ; for she is a true mystic, to whom each simple thing of nature or each homely human relation tells its own secret of meaning, and to-morrow's meaning may not be that of to-day, because the object is not a figure in a cipher, but a true symbol with infinite variety of revelation. The poem, for example, which gave its name to her first volume, may be read and enjoyed merely as a charming fairy-fantasy, and as such it is delightful and satisfying ; but behind the simple story of the two children and the goblin fruit-sellers is a little spiritual drama of love's vicarious redemption, in which the child redeemer goes into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, that by her painful conquest she may succour and save the sister who has been vanquished and all but slain. The luscious juices of the goblin fruit, sweet and deadly when sucked by selfish greed, become bitter and medicinal when spilt in unselfish conflict ; and the girl who knows that she has won love's victory can call exultantly—

“Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me,
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.

Eat me, drink me, love me ;
Laura, make much of me ;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men."

And so in "The Prince's Progress"—which deals with the mystery of temptation and fall and retribution, just as "Goblin Market" deals with the mystery of salvation through suffering—the prince's fateful loiterings are so many triumphs of the flesh, the world, and the devil ; and the corpse of the sweet princess, surrounded by the chanting maidens, is at once his dead bride, and the undying symbol of every opportunity lost, every vision unheeded, every grace foregone. The poet sets herself only to tell a story, not to speak a parable ; but as the story proceeds it seems to gather into itself a meaning and significance deeper and richer than its own.

In those devotional poems, which are to Miss Rossetti's work what the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" are to the work of Mrs Browning, the spiritual burden is made more explicitly manifest ; but still the realities of mystical vision make themselves felt through images of sensuous perception, as in the beautiful and tender poem which she calls "Symbols"—

"I watched a rosebud very long,
Brought on by dew and sun and shower,

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Waiting to see the perfect flower :
Then, when I thought it should be strong,
It opened at the matin hour
And fell at evensong.

"I watched a nest from day to day,
A green nest full of pleasant shade,
Wherein three speckled eggs were laid :
But when they should have hatched in May,
The two old birds had grown afraid
Or tired, and flew away.

"Then in my wrath I broke the bough
That I had tended so with care,
Hoping its scent should fill the air :
I crushed the eggs, not heeding how
Their ancient promise had been fair ;
I would have vengeance now.

"But the dead branch spoke from the sod,
And the eggs answered me again :
'Because we failed, dost thou complain ?
Is thy wrath just ? And what if God,
Who waiteth for thy fruits in vain,
Should also take the rod ?'"

The poem, it will be seen, opens with the sweet simplicity which might fitly characterise verses written for a child, and yet the searching and profound spiritual penetration of the sombre close is not a mechanical addition, like the fable of a moral : it is the soul of the poem, its essence, its life. It is this

pervading tone of solemnity, often austere but always intimately human, the tone of one who, living in the shadows, has had clear vision of the light beyond and knows herself a denizen in two worlds, which gives to Miss Rossetti's verse its unique impressiveness of spiritual appeal. In such poems as "The Three Enemies," "Dost thou not care?" "Weary in well-doing," "Good Friday," and that agonised cry from the depths, "Who shall deliver me?" the imagination which makes its presence known by absolute realisation and perfect rendering, descends into the hidden places of the spirit, and when it speaks it speaks through one for all. Sometimes it utters a remorse which only faith saves from despair; sometimes an unsatisfied yearning that is almost agony; sometimes, too, a hope that is the foretaste of a rapture, as in the lovely concluding stanza of "Paradise," and in the passionate, fervid close of the poem which celebrates the long watch of Advent—

"We weep because the night is long,
We laugh for day shall rise,
We sing a slow, contented song,
And knock at Paradise.
Weeping, we hold Him fast, Who wept
For us, we hold Him fast,
And will not let Him go except
He bless us first or last.

“ Weeping, we hold him fast to-night,
We will not let Him go
Till daybreak smite our wearied sight,
And summer smite the snow :
Then figs shall bud, and dove with dove
Shall coo the livelong day ;
Then He shall say, ‘ Arise, my love,
My fair one, come away.’ ”

I am not here making any attempt to appraise adequately the entire mass of Miss Rossetti's varied work. Her mastery of the sonnet—that most intricate, and, in the right hands, most expressive of all verse forms—might in itself provide a theme the interest of which would not speedily be exhausted. Nor would it be less meet and pleasant to pay tribute to the delicate and dainty fancy of such poems as those that find their place in the Pageant of the Months ; the glowing virginal passion of the songs of human love ; the haunting music of the lyrical melodies which the poet has made her own ; and the rich, though subdued, colour of the ever-present glory of natural imagery. Then, too, there are the volumes of prose stories and meditations of which much might be said ; but without forgetting or ignoring any of these things—which have the grateful praise of all lovers of beauty—special emphasis of attention may fitly be laid upon that union of profound imagination and quick spiritual sensibility, in virtue of which Miss

Rossetti takes her place by unchallengeable right among the foremost of our poets of devotion.

In the great mass of our so-called religious poetry, the devout emotion may be genuine and even fervid, but, for the most part, it finds expression in conventional and unimaginative forms; and the very loftiness of the theme renders us all the more painfully aware how little there is in the utterance of glow, unction, inspiration. In such poems as "The Pulley" of George Herbert, the lovely lines of Vaughan, "They are all gone into the world of light," the half-childlike, half-seraphic strains in which Frederick William Faber sang of the Divine Attributes, "The Sleep," and some of the miscellaneous sonnets of Mrs Browning, and in some twenty or thirty hymns of prayer, praise, or meditation which rise into heavenly places on beating wings, we recognise the rapt voice of one whose lips have been touched by a live coal from the altar; but in Miss Rossetti's poems of the inner life there is a sustained loftiness of flight, a winning tenderness of touch, a searching penetration of spiritual vision which, in such measure as hers, are to be found nowhere else in the whole domain of English poetry.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S PARADOX.

IN the suggestive collection of "Passages from the American Note-books of Nathaniel Hawthorne"—a book which adds interest to all the author's other books, because it gives us a peep into the workshop where they are constructed,—there is one sentence at which many readers must have paused to make a mental note of interrogation. It is a sentence which seems to declare that mankind at large has made a mistake concerning a matter about which mistake seemed impossible,—not a matter of argument regarding which we may be misled by reason, or of external fact which may be misapprehended by sense, but of emotional sensation itself. The matter in question is the effect produced by Selfishness upon those who suffer from its manifestations, and there appears little to be said concerning it that would not at once win universal assent. That selfishness is a universally hateful quality seems a maxim not only true enough, but trite enough for a copy-book heading,—

one of those ultimate facts of human nature which are too well established to need defence, and, indeed, too obvious to need statement. And yet, in spite of this universal consensus of feeling, Hawthorne, in the sentence of which I have spoken, boldly and unreservedly utters the apparent paradox that "Selfishness is one of the qualities apt to inspire love."

Concerning the nature of the special thought that was in Hawthorne's mind when he made the general statement expressed in this enigmatical sentence, one can only form conjectures, which are necessarily unverifiable. The "American Note-books" were, in the main, a storehouse of hints for future elaboration, and many of them were actually elaborated in his finished works. This, however, is not one of the many. So far as I can remember, Hawthorne never returned to the idea of which this note is a memorandum rather than a record, and it therefore remains a riddle, to which everyone has to find his own answer. The first impulse of the reader is naturally an impulse of contradiction; the statement seems to demand not interpretation, but denial. Nothing, at the first blush, seems more certain than that selfishness is the one quality which is absolutely fatal to love. Irritability or violence of temper, instability of emotion, egregious folly, ingrained dishonesty, repeated unfaithfulness, and various forms

of vice, all try love to the uttermost ; but numberless facts prove incontestably that it may maintain life in spite of them, because it is possible for any of them to exist in company with that genuine affection which the most abandoned seldom give without getting a return in kind somewhere. But selfishness is exclusive of this, for when fully developed, it is not merely a love of self, but such an absorbing self-love that it simply leaves no room in which any other affection can grow. If there be in existence a single person in whom selfishness is absolutely supreme, the tenderest emotion of which he can be capable is a feeling of mild complacency in those who contribute to the satisfaction of his desires, and so help to make up the pleasantness of his life. Being thus incapable of feeling love, he seems equally incapable of receiving it ; we see no crevice in his nature through which tenderness can enter, no outgrowth around which affection can cling.

Still, I am inclined to think that there is a solution to Hawthorne's enigma,—a valid defence for his apparent paradox. Selfishness is one, but its manifestations are many ; and while the naked quality is always repellent, it is possible for it to attire itself in clothing which shall be positively attractive. Of course, in the majority of cases it does *not* so attire itself. There is, for example, nothing to attract in

the selfishness of the cold-hearted man whose resources are within himself; who has not enough interest in others either to feel their claims upon him or to make claims upon them; who does not rob his neighbour, but who, when the neighbour has been robbed by some one else, and lies bleeding on the highway, quietly passes by on the other side. A man of this kind has often many of the sterner virtues, and receives accordingly his tribute of respect; but a warmer feeling does not visit him, and if it did, he would probably close his door against it. Even less is love drawn out by that vulgarer form of selfishness with which we are most familiar, and which is generally in our minds when we use the word. It is not only aggressive, but is often brutal in its aggressiveness. It totally and openly disregards the rights and tastes of others, and is always asserting some real or fancied rights of its own; always setting up its own tastes as the standard by which those around must regulate their lives. No one can mistake it; it puts on no veil, for, if its end be attained, it cares nothing for the unsightliness of the means. It is possible that a man whose ruling characteristic is of this type may have love bestowed upon him—indeed, some of the most pathetic tragedies of life arise from such bestowal,—but he does not *win* the love that he receives; it is a free

gift, or, rather, an offered sacrifice, and in no sense is it true that the selfishness inspires the love.

There are, however, other forms of selfishness, so cunningly veiled that they often pass without recognition; or if the veil do not altogether hide the ugly reality beneath, it so transfigures it as to give it an inexplicable charm. If the word might be applied to a being in whom the moral sense is quite undeveloped, we might say that a very young baby is the most absolutely and frankly selfish of mortals. It insists upon every desire being gratified, and cares nothing whatever for the inconvenience or even the pain that such gratification may entail upon its vassals. And yet the person who suffers the most from these demands, the mother, is the person who loves the most; and it is not fantastic, but quite reasonable, to attribute the unique intensity of her affection to the very constancy of these demands,—to her recognition of the fact that the little life is sustained in health and happiness only by the warmth of her heart and the activity of her hand. This is the explanation of the double sense of the word “care,” when used as a verb. It is in caring for her baby, in the sense of taking care of it, by protecting it on every side, and allowing it to know no unsatisfied want, that she comes to care for it so intensely in that other sense of being drawn to it by affection; and it is, indeed,

impossible to find a genesis for the peculiar love of the mother, unless we can trace it to the mother's pains and burdens.

Now, there are men and women who throughout their lives play consciously the part which the baby in the household plays unconsciously. They pose as the poor, helpless, unprotected member of the social circle, the baby of the family; and if the *rôle* be skilfully maintained, the results are frequently the same as in the case of the long-robed tyrant of the cradle. They manage, like him, to impress the surrounders with the feeling that from them nothing is to be expected, but that to them everything is to be rendered. They are not, like the exigent little morsel of humanity, vociferous in their demands; but they have a quiet way of taking it for granted that everyone wishes to do just what they desire to have done, which is as effective as the baby's wrathful cry or mournful wail. Few people who find themselves thus credited with an unfailing store of self-abnegation can refrain from an endeavour to live up to their reputation. "This afternoon," says the student, "I ought to write the chapter of my book for which the printer is waiting, but I know poor Mary expects me to offer to take her out, and it would be brutal to disappoint her." "I should like to go to the concert to-night," says the young girl, who

hardly ever has an evening's enjoyment ; " but if we all go out, there will be no one to read aloud to Uncle Edward while he smokes his cigar, and I know he will be hurt." And so poor Mary and Uncle Edward get their own way, and are, moreover, thought of pityingly and tenderly as people who need to be " compassed about with sweet observances," and who suffer keenly when they are withheld. True, they suffer in silence, but there is a look of disappointment which is harder to bear than any words of reproach ; and how cruel to call it up when it can so easily be kept away. And so, out of pity and the multitude of little services which pity prompts, springs a genuine affection, of something, the same kind as that of the mother for the baby. Love, indeed, is not given for love half so often as it is given for musical tones, and soft touches, and sweetly-urged claims. Affection tends to fix itself not upon those from whom we receive gifts, but upon those who receive gifts from us. The irresistible appeal made, not with rude demand, but with touching confidence, calls out the most generous part of our nature ; the best and noblest of our capacities—that of sweet self-renunciation—becomes inextricably associated with them ; and as they become bound up with our loftiest ideal, they become the recipients of our purest love. With no feeling

into which the thought of self does not enter, they attract the ardent affection of unselfish souls, and their very demands are the weapons with which love is conquered.

There are people in whose lives selfishness assumes another disguise, which equally justifies Hawthorne's statement. They are people of the pure, pleasure-loving nature, refined and sensitive, with keen æsthetic appreciation, and an intense delight in all harmonious and tranquil life. Really caring for no pleasure but his own, the man who belongs to this species is too tremblingly alive to be able to feel pleasure while in view of pain. He will, if need be, sacrifice everybody and everything to the satisfaction of his tastes, but of these tastes the most noteworthy is for a life of epicurean calm. The storms which surround the course of the aggressively selfish man would mar his keenest delights; it is absolutely essential to his happiness that his social atmosphere should be peaceful, stirred by gentle breezes, but never agitated by tempests. To secure this, he must be pleasure-giving as well as pleasure-getting, the giving being, indeed, a needful preliminary to the getting. To scatter gladness among others is not more truly the aim of the benevolent man than it is of the man of whom I am speaking; but with this difference, that in his case it is not an end, but simply

a means to the supreme end—the making of his own life comfortable.

The man who is not only selfish, but sensitive, *must* consider others, must endeavour to make himself and the circumstances over which he has control pleasant to them. This is simply a necessity of his nature. Pain of all kinds is distasteful to him, and as his finely-made organism compels him to feel the pain which he sees, he must needs exclude pain from his presence. The unjust judge of the parable was a specimen of this type, though an imperfect one. When the woman came with her pleading again and again, he said — “I will grant her request, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Her happiness was nothing to him, until it was brought into a certain definite relation to his own. Had he been a more typical example of the species, he would not have waited for repeated demands; had his sensibilities been more acute, they would not have needed the stimulus of importunity; he would have seen and foreseen the whole state of the case, would have yielded graciously to the first and least pressing request, and so would have won a rich store of ungrudged gratitude and humble affection. For in these matters people are, perhaps happily, very easily deceived. If appearances be pleasant, they are not careful to look for an unpleasant reality behind them;

and if they get kind words and considerate actions— if, indeed, they get nothing but pleasant common-places of courtesy uttered in pleasing tones, they are ready to give their hearts away, with a full belief that there is a heart waiting to be taken in exchange.

Though Hawthorne did not elaborate his own hint, it has been elaborated by other writers of fiction. Charles Dickens and Alphonse Daudet, in their portraits of Harold Skimpole and M. Delobelle, have done justice to the selfishness which cunningly plays the part of the grown-up baby, and ingenuously casts all its cares upon other people; and in Tito Melema, George Eliot has given us a subtle and veracious study of the other and more complex type of which we have spoken. Tito is an admirable embodiment of Hawthorne's thought. An inferior author would have told us that Tito was fascinating and loveable, but the value of George Eliot's portraiture lies in the subtle manner in which she enables us to feel his power, and to analyse the elements out of which it was evolved. She has shown us how his peculiar attractiveness was the inevitable result of his peculiar form of selfishness. Absorbing pleasure, he must needs radiate it, and his mere presence brought indefinable satisfaction. The account of the early days of Romola's love for him enables us to realise the true nature of this

gift, and to understand something which is almost unsusceptible of expression, save by actual representation. The nearness of such a joyous, joy-loving nature gave to Romola's life a light and colour it had never possessed before, and she could not but love him who had glorified her world for her, but yet "the trail of the serpent was over it all." She, like Baldassarre, found out the truth, when the finding could bring only pain. She found that the pleasure Tito gave, in so far as it was a conscious gift, was given simply for the sake of its reflex action upon himself. He was glad to diffuse delight, because it made his world delightful. He could not keep pain away for ever, but he would do so for a time; he would make the most of the noon, and ignore the inevitable night. When brought to bay, his selfishness came out in its naked repulsiveness; and, unable to gain any new delight in the contemplation of *her* delight, he never hesitated to purchase safety at the price of her pain.

When a woman like Romola is attracted by a man like Tito—and attracted she surely will be if he cross her path—there is a tragedy in preparation. The veil of superficial graciousness cannot long hide from some eyes the features behind. A really great nature will sooner or later see through it, and then, save for the strongest, there is nothing

left but despairing faithlessness. Smaller souls—souls like Tessa—may be deluded for ever, and in their delusion may be happy; but for Romola and Baldassarre there is a great blank in the universe, and their poor consolation is that woe has brought wisdom, and that they have learned the lesson of Hawthorne's paradox.

SOME SKYLARK POEMS.

THERE is nothing arbitrary or accidental in the fact that among the birds of the airy waste and the leafy woodland the skylark has received special honour at the hands of English poets. Possibly, if those useful but prosaic creatures, the statisticians of literature, were to count isolated references, it might be found that the nightingale had a wider suffrage of poetic celebration; but with many English singers knowledge of the nightingale is a thing of rumour and report, devoid of that intimacy which stirs the emotions to spontaneous impassioned utterance. His season is brief, his area is narrow, and perhaps the greater number of us live our threescore years and ten without being once thrilled by his uniquely moving music; but all the summer through, from every slope of lush meadow or stretch of heathery moorland, the lark rises into the blue with his rapturous ripple of song, and he who has eyes to see and ears to hear can hardly miss some vision of the soaring flight, some audit of the exultant melody. And yet, though, with the solitary ex-

ception of the urban house-sparrow, the skylark is the most familiar of English birds, there is always a certain fascination of strangeness in that sudden upward dart and arresting gush of music, which never fails to work its peculiar indefinable spell upon sense and spirit. We have many singers of the hedgerow and the woodland, but the lark is the only singer of the empyrean ; he alone realises for us the magical combination of the physical energy of soaring flight with the emotional rapture of the sustained passion of song.

It is therefore natural, and a thing to be expected, not to be wondered at, that we should have an anthology of the skylark just as we have anthologies of the themes provided by the four seasons, by sunrise and sunset, by the sea and the mountains, by love and patriotism, by sleep and death. The collection of skylark poems is comparatively a small one, but if it lacks impressiveness of bulk it possesses the more penetrative impressiveness conferred by emotional intensity and perfection of imaginative rendering. Shelley's poem, "To a Skylark," to name but a single example, must be numbered among the great lyrics of the world, and few who have sung of the "ethereal minstrel" can be said to have sung unworthily.

In the casual allusions to the skylark made by a

multitude of poets (an interesting collection of which is to be found in Mr Phil Robinson's volume, "*The Poet's Birds*"), the most frequent references are to that supposed habit of the bird which is commemorated in the proverb about rising with the lark and lying down with the lamb. Careful observers say that as a matter of prosaic fact the lark is not always the earliest of feathered singers, but the tradition of his priority has become too well established to be easily discredited. Chaucer tells how—

"Altho' it were not day by houres two
Yet sang the larke ;"

Shakespeare exclaims—

"Lo, here the gentle lark weary of rest
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high
And wakes the morning ;"

and Milton, in "*L'Allegro*," declares that one of the pleasures of the crew of Mirth to which he craves admission is—

"To hear the lark begin his flight,
And, singing, startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise."

Then, too, as the lark's early note has its suggestion of wakeful energy, so its upward singing flight is not less rich in suggestions of devout aspira-

tion, and "holy George Herbert," in his "Easter Wings," breathes the prayer—

"With Thee
Oh let me rise
As larks harmoniously,
And sing this day Thy victories;
Then shall the fall further the flight in me."

It is not, however, as a model of early rising or an embodiment of grateful aspiring devotion that the skylark has appealed to those poets who, by more direct and elaborate treatment, have made it specially their own. The rapture of the song, the nest in the grass, the commerce with the sky, the combined hints of homeliness and unearthliness, the ambassadorship between earth and heaven—these are the themes of the chief celebrators of the skylark. In Shelley's verse even the material physical life of the little singer altogether disappears. It is not, it never was, a bird : it is a "blithe spirit," only to be known through symbols of star and flower, and rainbow-cloud, and embowered maiden, and rose and glow-worm, and "poet hidden in the light of thought." It lives a conscious life free from all the limitations, longings, and pains of ordinary consciousness ; it is an "unbodied"—or as another reading has it, an "embodied"—joy, devoid even of a capacity for aught but happy exultation, and there-

fore no song of the human creatures who "look before and after and pine for what is not" can compare with its "rain of melody."

" Chorus hymeneal
Or triumphal chant
Matched with thine would be all
But an empty vaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

" What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain ?
What fields or waves or mountains ?
What shapes of sky or plain ?
What love of thine own kind ? what ignorance of pain ?

" With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be :
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee :
Thou lovest, but ne'er knew love's sad satiety."

In fact, Shelley's skylark, like his cloud and his west wind, is something entirely different from the physical object presented to ordinary sensation ; it is a living idea, a spiritual essence, and the effluence of its being is a supersensuous music heard by the poet alone. Few indeed are the poets with Shelley's art or instinct of etherealisation ; but to almost all singers of the skylark it is something more than a soaring carolling bird : its lonely home, its upward

flight, its sustained far-reaching ripple of jubilant song are rich in multiplicity of emotional or ethical suggestion. Of the less known skylark poems one of the most beautiful is that of Mrs Augusta Webster in the little volume entitled "A Book of Rhyme," where the skylark appears as the winged Hermes of love—a message-bearer between the loving on earth and the beloved in heaven.

"Winged voice to tell the skies of earth,
Sing earth-born lark, sing on, sing clear,
Sing into heaven that she may hear ;
Sing what thou wilt, so she but know
Thine ecstasy of summer mirth,
And think 'Tis from the world below.'

"Instant old wont returns fresh brought,
And her desire goes seeking me,
For whom her whole world used to be
And all my world for sake of her ;
She cannot think an earthward thought
That shall not seem my messenger.

"She will be glad for love, and smile,
Saying, 'Thank God for love like ours ;'
Saying, 'There come the kind home hours ;
His work-day will be sped ere long,
That keeps him hence this little while.'
Sing, lark, until she know thy song.

“Sing of the earth, but sing no care,
Sing thine own measureless content ;
She will remember what it meant ;
Griefs are too base, but, carolling thus,
Thou with thy joy may'st reach her there,
And she joy too, remembering us.”

Here the true motive is not the flight or song of a bird, but the outflowing of an emotion, just as in Wordsworth's most famous skylark poem it is a grave ethical lesson, the bird being discerned as a

“Type of the wise who soar but never roam,
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home.”

Wordsworth has, however, another poem “To a Skylark,” which, though less widely known—perhaps because it supplies no familiar quotation—is a much closer rendering of its nominal theme, and is characterised by a certain effusive gaiety seldom achieved by a poet whose normal mood was self-consciously meditative. Indeed, the stanzas are in many respects so un-Wordsworthian that few readers to whom they were unknown would guess their author.

“Up with me ! up with me into the clouds !
For thy song, lark, is strong !
Up with me ! up with me into the clouds
Singing, singing,

With clouds and sky about thee ringing,
 Lift me, guide me till I find
 The spot which seems so to thy mind.

.
 There is madness about thee, and joy divine
 In that song of thine;
 Lift me, guide me high and high
 To thy banqueting-place in the sky.

.
 Happy, happy liver,
 With a soul as strong as a mountain river
 Pouring out praise to the Almighty Giver,
 Joy and jollity be with us both ! ”

Wordsworth's joy was wont to be of a very quiet kind : when he tells us, for example, that his heart “dances with the daffodils,” we feel that the dance must be a very decorous and dignified movement ; and the mood of jollity, as ordinary mortals understand the word, was a mood with which we can hardly imagine him even desiring familiarity. Hence there is something in the exuberance of these lines which seems almost forced and unreal, as if the poet were trying hard to feel and express an emotion which he guessed at rather than shared. Still, the guess, as such, is a good one ; it brings us nearer to the actual singing lark than we are brought by the much finer, much more imaginative address to the “ethereal minstrel, pilgrim of the sky,” the true motive of

which is not the song but the home which inspires it
—"the nest upon the dewy ground,"

"The nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still."

The light-hearted Ettrick Shepherd had much more of natural fellow-feeling with the lark's jollity ; and "The Skylark" of Hogg is instinct with an eager spontaneity of sympathetic appreciation which Wordsworth strives after rather than attains.

"Bird of the wilderness, blithesome and cumberless,
Sweet be thy matin o'er moorland and lea ;
Emblem of happiness, blest be thy dwelling-place,
Oh, to abide in the desert with thee !"

The stanzas are too familiar to demand further quotation. They have perhaps more of fluent rhetoric than of the higher qualities of poetry, and they are marred by the unimaginative conventionalism "musical cherub" ; but they have the root of the matter in them, for they render a natural emotion with fervour, simplicity, and adequacy ; and when the lark suddenly rises before us with his burst of melody, most of us will find that the feeling of the moment is uttered most truly not by the dithyrambic of Shelley or the reflective strain of Wordsworth, but by the homely music of Hogg.

Less widely known but equally worthy of the suffrages of lovers of the lark, with not less of lyrical fervour, and with a more distinct stamp of imagination, is Mr Eric Mackay's "Waking of the Lark." Mr Mackay also sings of the bird rather than philosophises upon it, save in the earlier stanzas which express a craving, born of human self-consciousness, for an utterance denoting a knowledge of grief as well as of joy.

"Methinks a bard (and thou art one) should suit his song
to sorrow,
And tell of pain, as well as gain, that waits us on the
morrow ;
But thou art not a prophet, thou,
If naught but joy can touch thee now ;
If, in thy heart, thou hast no vow that speaks of Nature's
anguish."

Here is certainly an intrusion of the *Weltschmerz* which dominates so much of our modern verse, but as Mr Mackay warms to his theme his song frees itself from the tone of pensive reflectiveness, and becomes instinct with an unalloyed and unsophisticated sympathy with the gladness of happy life.

"This is the advent of the lark — the priest in grey
apparel,—
Who doth prepare to trill in air his sinless summer
carol ;

This is the prelude of the lay
The birds did sing in Cæsar's day,
And will again, for aye and aye, in praise of God's
creation.

"O dainty thing, on wonder's wing, by life and love elated,
Oh! sing aloud from cloud to cloud, till day be
consecrated;
Till from the gateways of the morn,
The sun, with all its light unshorn,
The robes of darkness round him torn, doth scale the
lofty heavens!"

Neither Hogg nor Mr Mackay loses sight of the object, but we can find in the poetry of the lark an even closer intimacy of association and a finer fidelity of rendering. It is, as has been seen, a way of the poets to sing of the bird, not as a mere bird, but as a lovely natural image or embodiment of human thought or feeling. For verses in which we find the lark, and nothing but the lark, we have to turn to a living poet. In Mr George Meredith's lovely lyric, "The Lark Ascending," we have no "blithe spirit," no "ethereal minstrel," no "love-bearing messenger," no "musical cherub"; we have this — the lark himself.

"He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur, and shake,

All interwoven and spreading wide,
 Like water-dimples down a tide
 Where ripple ripple overcurls
 And eddy into eddy whirls ;
 A press of hurried notes that run
 So fleet they scarce are more than one,
 Yet changingly the thrills repeat
 And linger ringing while they fleet.

.
 Unthinking save that he may give
 His voice the outlet, there to live
 Renewed in endless notes of glee,
 So thirsty of his voice is he,
 For all to hear and all to know
 That he is joy, awake, aglow.

.
 Shrill, irreflective, unrestrained,
 Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained
 Without a break, without a fall,
 Sweet-silvery, sheer lyrical,
 Perennial, quavering up the chord
 Like myriad dews of sunny sward
 That trembling into fulness shine,
 And sparkle, dropping argentine."

No one who has read it can forget one pathetic incident of Dr Oliver Wendell Holmes's "Hundred Days in Europe." The veteran autocrat and his party were traversing Salisbury Plain, when all at once—but the story must be told in his own words :

"As we drove over the barren plain, one of the party suddenly exclaimed, 'Look! look! see the lark rising!' I looked up with the rest. There was the bright blue sky, but not a speck upon it which my eyes could distinguish. Again, one called out, 'Hark! hark! hear him sing!' I listened, but not a sound reached my ear. Was it strange that I felt a momentary pang? *Those that look out of the windows are darkened, and all the daughters of music are brought low.* Was I never to see or hear the soaring songster at Heaven's gate—unless, unless if our mild humanised theology promises truly, I may, perhaps, hereafter listen to him singing far down beneath me?"

To have come within sight and hearing of the skylark, and yet to know that never in life will it be seen or heard, may be a "sentimental grievance," yet it is a trouble which somehow appeals to us more keenly than the substantial annoyance of a delayed or lost dinner. But the story has been transcribed for the sake of pointing out that if Dr Holmes, or anyone else who had never listened to the skylark, wished to realise—so far as such realisation might be possible—the music and magic of the unheard melody, we should send him not to Shelley or Wordsworth, or even to Hogg or Mr Mackay, but to Mr George Meredith with his rendering of "the silver chain of sound," the "press of hurried notes that run so fleet they scarce are more than one," the "simple singing

of delight" that is sustained "without a break, without a fall."

It is true that nature and all the things of nature are made human and lovable by what Mr Ruskin has called "the pathetic fallacy," and the poetry which embodies that fallacy has a charm which is all its own; but there is another charm not less potent, though with a differing potency, in the poetry which tells nature's own secret, not the secret of man's passions and yearnings written in a hieroglyph of star and cloud and bird and flower. The poetry of the skylark which is compact of image and symbol and parable is lovely and delightful, but it would be incomplete without that other poetry in which we see and hear the brown bird himself, and are made to feel that his own little life of soaring song is not unworthy of celebration.

ANNIE KEARY.

THERE are certain books which, like certain people, come home to us and take our affection captive we hardly know why or how. Both the people and the books have certain beautiful qualities which we can name and separate ; but we feel that their charm lies less in these than in something which we cannot name, and which is inseparable in thought from our total impression of them. It is not something that they *have* but something that they *are* which so irresistibly attracts us. If we should interrogate our love concerning its right to exist the reply might seem disappointingly inadequate ; but such interrogation never occurs to us : we accept the love as we accept the sunshine without asking for credentials.

Among the volumes which thus appeal to me is the "Memoir of Annie Keary," by her sister. It is in no way a famous book, but indeed famous books seldom win this special kind of affection. Even in 1882, when it saw the light, it attracted little attention, and probably it is now altogether forgotten save by those for whom it preserves the memory of a

winning, gracious personality, and those others who never knew Annie Keary in life, but who in these pages have discovered a spirit to whom their own spirits go out with a fine impulse of kinship. I myself met her but once—in that pretty Campden Hill drawing-room which stands out in recollection as a place of pleasantness and peace ; but that one meeting with its hour of quiet talk made me feel that I knew Annie Keary better than I knew some with whom my hours of talk had been many, and so the coming of the book seemed like the visit of a friend.

Of course it must have come into the hands of many who have no such experience to prompt their welcome, but few, I fancy, can have been unconscious of its peculiar charm. I dare say there was little in Annie Keary's life which called with loud insistence for a written record of it, and yet I think most people will feel with me that the record as it stands needs no apology, but like a field flower, justified by its existence its right to exist. Indeed, there are probably others besides myself who have never been able to see why biography should concern itself mainly with people of noteworthy achievement, or to feel the justice of the remark, so frequently heard, that the performances of such or such a person have not been sufficiently remarkable to make his life an object of interest to the world. On the contrary, it would not

be difficult to defend the seeming paradox that those whom we call distinguished people are the least fitted to be chosen as subjects for biography. The politician's enactments and the soldier's victories belong to history ; the painter's pictures and the poet's verses provide material for criticism ; but as a *man* the politician or the soldier, the painter or the poet may not be more interesting than his fellows ; and it is far from improbable that the amount of force expended in "work" which is before the public has left the private remainder of his life somewhat impoverished. Carlyle, in a well-known sentence, attributes the charm of biography to the fact that "all men are, to an unspeakable degree, brothers ;" and it can hardly be denied that the sense of brotherhood is appealed to most strongly by lives which, in virtue of their simple humanness, touch our own lives oftener and more poignantly than they are ever touched by the records of those who have been called from the crowded highway to the solitary mountain-path.

Annie Keary's was one of these highway pilgrimages, and the simple history of her uneventful progress through the dusty lanes of life seems, while one reads it, to make the very same lanes less dusty for us who follow, the familiar hedgerows greener and sweeter than we have been wont to think them,

the blue of heaven intenser and its gray tenderer than they have ever seemed before, the whole journey a more solemn and yet a gladder and a fairer thing. As I close the volume after the latest reading of it the life spreads itself before me like a picture such as William Blake might have painted—the picture of a little procession, with the angels of Faith and Hope and Love leading the way for Annie Keary, who holds by one hand a tiny child, by the other one of the little servant-maidens of the Bessborough Home, and is followed by a crowd of the fearful, the faltering, or the friendless, whose hopes and fears and joys and sorrows are all her own. Readers of her novels, pleasant with a restful pleasantness which is nowadays so rare, and of the delightful stories which she wrote for the children whom she loved, find them full of tender touches and gleams of happy insight which they would not willingly let slip from grateful recollection; but it seems most natural to think of her not as the author of “Janet’s Home” and “A Doubting Heart,” but as the “Aunt Annie” of so many nurseries, the “Sister Keary” who brought a flash of welcome to pale little faces in the East End Children’s Hospital, the woman whose heart was rich enough to meet every claim, not of love only, but of need.

No one who knows anything of, or cares anything for, the inner life of little children will think that

Miss Eliza Keary made a mistake in devoting so many pages of her book to the winning sketch of Annie Keary's childhood. Since Mrs Gaskell told the story of the four marvellous children who wrote romances and talked high-Tory politics in the lonely Haworth parsonage, I know no more realisable picture of those fascinating chambers of imagery in which the imaginative child lives so much of his life than that which is painted here. The backgrounds were, indeed, different, for the solitary moorland Yorkshire parsonage had little in common with that other parsonage in the crowded Yorkshire street ; but a child's fancy can deal as potently with unpromising material as could the benign fairy with the pumpkin which served for Cinderella's state-carriage, and even in Hull the little Annie made for herself a new world, a region of fairy romance.

It was she who called out of the realm of nothingness into the nursery myth-kingdom that mysterious fairy potentate Mrs Calkill, who, since those days, has been the delight of innumerable little ones ; it was she who set on foot the conversational stories in which the heroes were Alcibiades and Plato and Pericles (concerning whom were told many things not recorded by Plutarch) and Themistocles and Socrates, who met for the first time in the Hull play-room, and became friends at once ; while from

her childish imagination came the fascinatingly terrible story of the persecuted nun who was imprisoned in a subterranean dungeon in the very house where they were living, and of whom—delightful thought!—she and her playmates were the appointed rescuers. One incident in the carrying out of this achievement is charmingly indicative of the vividness of a child's imagination, the fervour of her faith, and the sweet simplicity of her natural piety. Miss Eliza Keary tells how, when the hour for the great adventure had fully come, and

“The sceptics had been talked into something like the submission of private judgment, and had agreed to assist in the great act of the drama. Twilight had given place to darkness, and a chill, eerie feeling was creeping over us all. There was one sweet little girl in the group, Fanny by name, who had been among the first to take the matter seriously, and yet had not given way to childish fears; she soothed and strengthened her sisters and cousins; she looked so sweet and wise and reliable that the halts began to look up to her as a sort of leader, and when the darkness drew us into closer fellowship, she made us kneel down while she offered up a prayer for the success of the undertaking. After this, with lighted candle, with chisel and hammer, we all, Annie and Fanny leading the way, proceeded to the scene of danger.”

Among all the pictures of child-life which I can at the moment recall, I can think of none prettier or

more touching than this of the little, timid, but trustful group kneeling in the darkness to ask the aid of the Great Helper in their deed of high emprise.

As Annie Keary grew older, she passed from the life of the Hull play-room to that of a boarding-school. It was a narrower life on the whole, but it was made happy to her by the love of her companions, and was not seriously troubled by want of appreciation on the part of her teachers, who regarded with sad severity her loose renderings of "dear Mr Baker's sermons"—which deafness prevented her from hearing—and mourned over the worldly-mindedness which indulged itself in frivolous conversations on such unspiritual topics as "gravitation and the stars." Here, in this not specially exhilarating or sympathetic environment, Annie Keary's life of human service had its first tentative beginnings. One school custom, which tempered with sweetness the pervading acidity, was the adoption of the younger children by their older companions, who filled, in a simple, girlish way, the place of mothers to their little charges. There were many who loved to call Annie Keary "mother," and most of the children who came to her share were the very troublesome ones, "those whom everybody else had tried and been tired out by; and she loved them as if they were so many cherubs. It might seem to outsiders that they imposed upon her good

nature; but, after all, the unruly spirits did grow tamer with her, and the weakly ones stumbled less often in her company. It was astonishing how many good points came to the front; how teachers and scholars alike began to hope where she had first believed."

It was this all-believing and all-hoping charity—more, perhaps, than any other gift or grace—which made every one who came near to Annie Keary feel that it was good to be there. And it *was* good, for love has the happy alchemy which makes or tends to make the object of it lovable; and it is not hard to believe that the understanding gentleness which never saw the worst side of others chiefly, or first, or indeed at all, or could ever be persuaded "that any one was out-and-out base, hypocritical, unworthy," had a wonderful sanative quality and was full of health and strength and stimulation. Accompanying this boundless trust in others, which must have added largely to her happiness, was a haunting distrust of herself which at times was doubtless a source of pain, or at any rate, of disquiet. This lack of confidence was most apparent in her feeling for her literary work, and "whenever the voice from the world outside seemed to confirm the mistrustful voice within, a slight recoil upon herself began, which arrested to a certain extent her progress, and drew a

veil of reticence over her spirit which was injurious to herself as an artist." But this distrust was interwoven with the whole fabric of her being; she lacked self-sufficiency in the good as well as in the evil sense of the word, yet had nevertheless a beautiful healthfulness and courage of nature which prevented her attitude of dependence from wearing the similitude of unworthy weakness.

To the history of Annie Keary's inner life this quality or defect of mind—and it will seem either according to the point of view—gives a peculiar interest and fascination. She never altogether lost her feeling of the need of help—of some external sanction for her own spiritual instincts; and she found such help and sanction in places far removed from each other, and in assurances which seem at first to have no common ground. She found help or teaching or spiritual stimulus in the words of Charles Kingsley touching the doctrine which has been described by a phrase of Tennyson's as "the larger hope;" in the more sharply-outlined doctrine of the sisters with whom she worked so devotedly among East London slums; in the counsels of perfection uttered by teachers from the western Hemisphere, who came with their doctrine of entire sanctification; and even from the thaumaturgic revelations of spiritualism she was able to extract something which for



the time was, in its way, nutritive and not poisonous. Still, howsoever sympathetically made, a bald summary of these things does injustice to this beautiful soul: only in reading Annie Keary's story as her sister tells it is it possible to see and feel how natural and inevitable were these seekings after perfect light in her journey through the shadows. We do not think of her as being blown about helplessly by every wind of doctrine, but rather as finding in every air that blew a favouring breeze carrying her nearer to the haven where she would be.

I did not set out to write of Annie Keary's work in literature, though it would be pleasant to write of it as of any good and beautiful thing that has been valued at less than its desert. Now, when the literature of imagination is dominated by aggressively emphasised outline and garish colour, there is little chance for work, the charm of which lies in expression, in atmosphere, in pervading sentiment; but there will be a day yet again for "Oldbury" and "A Doubting Heart." To those who do not know them, their peculiar quality may perhaps be best indicated by saying that Annie Keary's genius had much in common with that of Mrs Gaskell. She had much of Mrs Gaskell's exquisitely felt and delicately rendered observation; of her instinct for the types of character and narrative in the treatment of which

• her temperament could make itself most pleasantly manifest ; of her simple tenderness and her kindly humours ; of her brightness which gave illumination without glare ; and she had also an imaginative fervour of realisation—especially in her rendering of natural beauty—which I do not think (though in this I may be mistaken) was among Mrs Gaskell's varied and gracious gifts. There is a lovely passage in "*A Doubting Heart*," describing Emmie West's lonely ramble among the scenery of Pégomas. She has turned downward from the heights whence she has looked out upon the valleys and the olive-crowned hills, with "farther away patches of parti-coloured fields, showing like fairy-gardens in the golden afternoon light ; and farthest of all, between the opening heights on the far horizon, another blue, deeper and more dazzling than the blue overhead, a moving, living radiance, the blue of the Mediterranean, melting and losing itself in the trembling sky-line." Then comes a slower movement in a changed key—

"It was almost a rest to turn into the green darkness of the pine-wood after looking at so much light, and Emmie made her way quickly to the head of the valley, where a tiny mountain rivulet burst from the rocky hill-side, and began its course through the ravine. A flock of sheep and goats conducted by a young shepherdess followed her down the steep ; and for years afterwards, whenever Emmie thought of *La Roquette*, it was that particular scene and

its accompanying sounds and sensations that came vividly back to her. The tinkling of the sheep-bells, the gurgle of the rivulet, the rough ferns and mosses that choked its shallow bed, the little shepherdess's shrill voice calling her dog; deep evening stillness but for these sounds, and a sense of solitude greater even than had been felt on the lonely road with its wide views. Here there was only the dark vista of the pine-wood she had passed through, the sheltering hill-sides all around her, the depths of shadowy verdure at her feet, and above all, a flowing line of crimson light where the height from which she had descended caught the rays of the setting sun. Her heart echoed back the peace, the joyful calm, with which the little valley from its crowning crimson height to its cool emerald depths overflowed. All within her was in harmony with the outside serenity."

The process of guessing at the unknown from hints provided by the known, of completing the circle from the arc, is natural to unsophisticated humanity; but when the known arc is a writer's work, and the unknown circle is the writer himself, it is sometimes found bitterly disappointing. As Alexander Smith says—"The heat of inspiration may be subtracted from the household fire, and those who sit by it may be the colder in consequence. A man may put all his good things in his books, and leave none for his life, just as a man may expend his fortune on a splendid dress, and carry a pang of hunger beneath it." It was not so with Annie

Keary. So far from her books impoverishing her life, her life enriched her books with her native opulence of fine emotion. Even her pure literary gift was not penuriously husbanded for the public who bought and read her volumes; such pleasure as it could give was at the service of every friend—of every little working-maid at the Bessborough Home. It had become the fashion to say disdainfully of this or that published work, "It is not literature." Of course Annie Keary's letters to the housemaids and dressmakers, to whom she had given a God-speed on that pathway through life, made no claim to be literature; but there would be little temerity in making such a claim for them, and it is a claim which I think no critic would disallow. There is a passage about a broken hyacinth in a letter written to a young girl in a reformatory whom she had known as a servant, which is, in its miniature way, as adequately felt and finely finished as any one of Mrs Gatty's beautiful "Parables from Nature"; and this is only one of many such. To Annie Keary beautiful thoughts and visions, and the power of rendering them, were not given for "copy," but for service. She did not fling pearls before swine, even when she gave "literature" to a girl in a reformatory, for there were no swine in the fauna of her world. To a young friend she wrote—

"If we could get inside anyone, our greatest enemy, the person who disgusts and wounds us most, we should get revelations that would surprise us, and that would melt all our dislike into tenderest pity and love. Pray for God's light in which to see others, and then you will be at peace, for you will love. The great thing to help against irritation is always to try to get out of your own point of view into other people's, and find out how things look to them; then you will always be able to make excuses for them."

Perhaps an impossible optimism, as all optimism must be that fails to recognise the root of wrong in the erring impulse as well as the erring thought, but it is truer than the pessimism which sees evil rather than good as normal; and whatever measure of justice we may deal out to ourselves, we are right oftener than we are wrong in saying of our neighbour's sin, *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*.

To Annie Keary the maxim was not a mere formula but the natural expression of an inborn instinct. Her beautiful spirit, which loved beauty, sought for it everywhere, and what she sought she found. Let me adapt Thackeray's last words of Clive Newcome's friend, J. J. Ridley, and say of her—"Wanderers through the world, we meet now and then with such divine charity, and salute it and hush while it passes on."

THE HYPOCRITE OF FICTION.

OF all the stock characters of fiction which turn up from generation to generation, without any variety save of costume and phraseology, one of the most constantly attractive, both to writers and readers, is the personage who deliberately uses unctuous professions of religious feeling or high-toned morality as a cloak for the most thorough-going and unmitigated rascality. Few people may be able to agree with Charles Lamb's paradox that a thief is a very respectable man, but everyone will admit that the hypocrite is—on paper—the most delightful companion in the world. Were Blifil not a fool as well as a rogue he would be as charming as Tom Jones, and Philosopher Square is certainly more entertaining than Mr Allworthy. Which of us would not rather dispense with a dozen courageous heroes or beautiful heroines than lose the fascinating companionship of Joseph Surface with his maxims and "sentiments," or of the immortal Mr Pecksniff with his universal benevolence and overpowering self-abnegation? The scamp of literature is generally more entertaining than the model of all

the virtues, whatever be the special character of his scampishness; but in the firmament of rascality one star differs from another star in glory, and the ideal hypocrite is a luminary of the first magnitude. It is easy to see why the Joseph Surfaces and the Pecksniffs of fiction are so universally popular. A broadly humorous conception is always widely appreciated; and as the essence of humour has again and again been said to lie in incongruity, it is natural enough that characters like these, which are a mass of incongruities of an almost farcically obvious type, should at once win, and not only win but retain, the suffrages of the reading world. Another cause for the popularity of this kind of portraiture is found in the direct appeal it makes to our self-esteem. Most readers are sufficiently childlike, or childish—it is unnecessary to decide which—to extract a considerable amount of real gratification from the consciousness that they are so much superior in acuteness to those persons in the play or the novel who are blind enough to be duped by the cunning hypocrite. We enjoy Joseph Surface because we find him out from the first, and therefore feel ever so much cleverer than his brother Charles, Sir Peter Teazle, and all the other people who never find him out at all until the moment comes when, in the very nature of things, it is impossible that they should be deceived any longer. The same may be

said of Mr Pecksniff or any other of the typical hypocrites of fiction. We exercise our wits upon them, and our wits serve us so well that we come at last to have a feeling resembling affection for the scoundrel whose villainies we have been able so cleverly to unmask, just as a detective might be expected to look with considerable amiability upon the ingenious forger or burglar whose resources have proved unequal to his own.

The representation of any given type of character may, however, be very amusing and enjoyable without being in the least true; and the truthfulness of the ordinary portraits of the hypocrite which are so numerous in the great picture gallery of fiction is, to say the least, doubtful. My own impression is that the person represented is about as real as the sea-serpent, and that the grounds for believing in his flesh-and-blood existence are about as valid as the so-called proofs for the existence of the much renowned monster of the deep. Imagination is such a protean faculty that the results of its action are frequently mistaken for conclusions sanctioned by reason and facts verified by observation. An acute critic once remarked of Lord Macaulay that he always stated so clearly what he intended to prove that he left his readers with the impression that he had actually proved it. In fact, the credence of most

people is gained much more clearly by vivid presentation than by accumulation of evidence. They believe in the sea-serpent because they have been completely conquered by a multiplicity of little details. How can they help believing in it when they have heard how many feet long it is, what is the shape of its head, and know all about the manner in which it propels itself through the water? In like manner, how can they help believing in Mr Pecksniff when he is put before them so vividly that they would know him anywhere, and can even hear in fancy the tones of his voice as he speaks of the town where he "takes the liberty to reside," or expresses a wish to hear the opinion of Mrs Todgers on the subject of wooden legs?

They cannot help it, and we do not know of any reason why they should try to help it. If we are to get the full measure of possible enjoyment out of any work of art we must submit to the spells of the artistic magician, and for the time agree to accept as realities the phantoms which flit over his enchanted ground; but when we have extracted from this acquiescent attitude of mind all the pleasure it is capable of yielding, we may gain another kind of gratification by, so to speak, turning round upon ourselves; by analysing the sources of our enjoyment, and putting fiction side by side with fact in order to see

how much of the delight given by the former consists in its likeness, and how much in its unlikeness, to the latter.

So far as my own observation has gone, I am driven to the conclusion that the hypocrite of fiction is a personage who appears in fiction and nowhere else. To deny that there ever existed such a person as Joseph Surface or Mr Pecksniff would be injudicious, for the simple reason that nobody is acquainted with all the people who have existed, and it is difficult to set a limit either to the moral or the physical freaks of nature; but it is by no means difficult to prove that such a character is as truly abnormal as the Siamese twins or the "two-headed nightingale." Of course it can neither be reasonably denied that there is such a vice as hypocrisy, nor affirmed that its manifestations are particularly rare. Hypocrisy is, indeed, unpleasantly common, but it is a very different, a much less amusing, and a much more dangerous quality than the counterfeit presentment which stands as its substitute on the boards of the stage and in the pages of the novel. The one distinguishing peculiarity of the hypocrite of fiction is that he is a conscious and deliberate humbug. He does not believe in his own professions of religion or philanthropy, but adopts them—as the peripatetic cardsharp adopts his rustic garb and his innocent

expression—in order to deceive and swindle his neighbours. It is clear that if this be the ordinary type of hypocrisy, the successful hypocrite must be a singularly clever person. He must possess in a high degree a number of qualities which, while singly more or less rare, are in combination hardly to be found anywhere. He must have insight into character, that he may gauge the gullibility of each victim; he must have wonderful tact to keep him from mistakes as to the best method of approach; he must, for reasons too obvious to be particularised, have a fine histrionic gift; and he must, moreover, possess sufficient sympathy with true religious emotion or lofty moral impulse to imitate its manifestations with some decent approach to verisimilitude. A man of this kind would have so many resources that he would be extremely unlikely to tie himself down to the very troublesome plan of making his way by affecting to hold convictions with which he had no sympathy, and conditioning his life by altogether distasteful limitations. The villain in a transpontine melodrama, who is generally as much of a fool as a knave, every now and then exclaims, “I must dissemble”; but if a clever man were to set himself to dissemble through every hour of his life, he would soon come to the conclusion that the game was not worth the candle.

But the curious thing is that the ordinary hypocrite of fiction is *not* clever. Hardly ever does he exhibit even one of the characteristics just enumerated ; and, without troubling ourselves to apply any of the tests given by observation of the real world, this fact is quite sufficient to discredit him. In any assemblage not composed entirely of idiots, Joseph Surface and Mr Pecksniff would be found out in half an hour, for they have no idea of the most elementary conditions of successful deception. They do not believe in their own professions, and their disbelief is so patent that they are not likely to compel the belief of any intelligent person. The hypocrite of real life is not, save in those rare moments of introspection which usually occur in solitude, a conscious humbug ; he does believe in himself and in his own professions, and this is just what makes him so successful and so dangerous. His life is, indeed, spent in two moral worlds which have very little in common, but he is a naturalised citizen of both, and feels as much at home in the one as in the other. When it is discovered that some eminent financier who has lived in the odour of sanctity, taken the chair at religious meetings, and publicly “engaged in prayer” with much unction, has been for years raising money on forged securities and appropriating to his own purposes the scanty store of the widow

and the orphan which has been entrusted to his care, people all at once jump to the conclusion that his speeches and his prayers, his pious phrases and his handsome subscriptions, have been nothing but a series of clever tricks devised with the express purpose of hoodwinking the public. They cannot understand how a man who in the seclusion of his private office concocts a fictitious power of attorney on Monday morning can possibly be sincere in expressing an ardent desire for the propagation of the Gospel on Monday night. That the two actions are morally discordant is of course plain, and the perception of their discordance easily develops into a conviction of their irreconcilability save by the theory of deliberate deception. The conviction is arrived at almost instinctively, which is certainly in its favour; but it is easy to show that it is radically false. That a man's religion, if sincere, ought to affect his moral action goes without saying; but that it necessarily *does* affect it is a proposition which can never be proved except by the somewhat illogical process of denying sincerity to every lofty emotion which does not produce lofty moral conduct. As a matter of fact, religion and philanthropy may be indulged in quite sincerely as emotional luxuries, and it does not follow that because a man really enjoys a prayer meeting, and is warmly interested

in the welfare of savages three thousand miles away, that his whole conduct must be inspired by love for God and for his neighbours. Human life, as it really is, does not possess the symmetry which philosophers and novelists claim for it. It is a thing of shreds and patches, and the patches are very inharmonious both in shape and colour. A fine poetic sensibility or a true feeling for ideal beauty seems inconsistent—and in any mere theoretical statement will be pronounced inconsistent—with coarse tastes and the grosser forms of vice ; but when we come to the world of fact we have to admit that Byron took far too much gin and water, and that Turner never felt more at home than when basking in the smiles of the trulls of Wapping. No one, because of these facts, ever thinks of denying Byron's poetic insight or Turner's artistic feeling ; but it would be quite as reasonable to deny either as it is to affirm that because a man is no better than he should be in his commercial or social relations, his piety is necessarily a deep-laid delusion, and his philanthropy a carefully constructed snare.

The mixed motives and conflicting lines of conduct which characterise the real hypocrite can, however, only be intelligibly portrayed by a writer in whom great powers of analysis and synthesis are combined ; and as this combination is uncom-

mon, and is not needed for the ordinary ends of fiction, the hypocrite of the popular novel is the shallow and absurd scoundrel whose fancy portrait has been so often painted for us. One writer of our day has, indeed, succeeded perfectly in setting before us a credible representation of the genuine article—the hypocrisy of real life. In Mr Bulstrode, the Middlemarch banker, we see a man who is under the sway of a double set of impulses which, though really discordant, are made to harmonise by sophisms which, because they make him comfortable, he rests in as satisfactory until the fact of their inherent rottenness is forced upon him by the prospect of quickly coming exposure. Only when the course of events compels him to turn round upon himself and regard his life through the eyes of those whom he has wronged, does he really feel that there has been a fatal inconsistency between his professions and his practice. The moral blindness, which was none the less real because it had been self-induced, enabled him to serve God and mammon with equal fervour, and, in a sense, with equal sincerity. His own success, and the success of the religious and philanthropic causes in which he was interested, had become bound together in his mind by a very simple law of association; and it was natural enough for him to feel that so useful a servant of God as Nicholas

Bulstrode might fairly claim freedom from limitations which had been laid down for the guidance of less active and valuable men. Some people may say that a man of this order is not, in the strict sense of the word, a hypocrite at all ; but this is only because he does not embody the curious ideal which they have evolved partly from their moral consciousness, like the German's camel, and partly from an accumulation of hints derived from the circulating library and the stage. If the Bulstrode course of action be not hypocrisy, it may safely be said that hypocrisy is not a real but an imaginary vice. If in our search for a hypocrite we refuse to be satisfied with anything short of Mr Pecksniff, we may as well abandon the quest at once, for it is certain to be fruitless. We shall find a phoenix or a salamander quite as soon as a reality corresponding to the curious portrait of the conventional hypocrite of ordinary fiction.

MR DU MAURIER'S MAGIC MIRROR.

LIKE many men of genius, and like many more men whose lack of genius is as obvious as my own, I am a person whose mental grasp fails him when the objects handled happen to be dates. Of course I refer not to the fruit so called, which is, indeed, too sticky to be handled with comfort, but to the days, months, or even years, distinguished by the occurrence of more or less important events. I remember the year of the Norman Conquest, which, I suppose, belongs to the former category ; I also remember the year of my own birth, which certainly belongs to the latter ; but when I travel further afield, I find myself compelled to rely upon the Dictionary of the invaluable Haydn and the memories of numerically-minded friends.

Happily, however, there are means of mitigating all infirmities, save a congenital lack of humour or common sense, and by the aid of that useful law of the association of ideas I have been able to fix one

date which is worth remembering. It was, I am sure, in the spring of 1891 that a bookseller, in a certain northern town, tempted me with the volumes of Mr du Maurier's "Society Pictures" from *Punch*. I knew that I could not then afford the books, and the Mephistophelean bookseller knew it also; but for all his knowledge he tempted me, and I fell. Alas, for human weakness and wickedness. At this present time of writing, it is nearly four years since my fall, and so far from being a penitent sinner, I glory in my offence. It has been followed by no pangs of remorse, but by one long satisfaction, which every now and then intensifies itself in high delight. Some books are for sunny days, some for dull ones, some for hours of jollity, others for hours of gloom, but in all sorts and conditions of days and hours, the "Society Pictures" are abundantly satisfying. If the work could only be put into one's pocket—and, alas, that is impossible—it would be "that faultless monster which the world ne'er saw." I cannot appraise it worthily; I doubt whether I can in any proper sense of the word appraise it at all; I write simply for the relief of uttering an immense enjoyment.

The charm of Mr du Maurier as a picture-maker would be analysable only by an expert, but it evidently comes of a rare combination of artistic

and intellectual endowments. He is an admirable draughtsman; he has a vivid pictorial sense; he possesses a quick feeling for humour, and he has an alert activity in creating it, especially as it inheres in situations which lend themselves to picturesque treatment; and in addition he has a marvellously intimate knowledge of the *nuances* of caste and character which appertain to that section of civilised humanity called "Society." As a delineator of men and women, Mr du Maurier has his equals, and has had his superiors: as a delineator of those accidental Brahmins, the gentleman and gentlewoman, he has but one, and that one—the great Sir Joshua—lies under the disadvantage of being dead. Then, too, Sir Joshua's fair women and brave men front us as single figures with the expression of a personality, but not the added expression of a situation. He painted members of society, while Mr du Maurier draws society itself, with its quiet but significant crises, its polite encounters of look and tongue, its momentary dramatic juxtapositions, all the tranquil business of its high comedy, with now and then a touch of its inevitable farce.

For Mr du Maurier is not afraid of the farcical element, though his natural preference is for quiet merriment. The expression of the gigantic pianist, who protests to his scheming and mortified hostess

that he will bend a poker or hold a lighted candle in his mouth to "amuse de gompany," but that he cannot "blay de biano" after dinner; and of Miss Golightly, who remarks that 'she has been spending her holidays "in a punt with my favourite man—a quite too delicious man," are examples of Mr du Maurier's fun at his broadest, as also are many of the drawings in which Sir Gorgius Midas is the prominent figure. But though things of this kind may be among his most effective hits, they can hardly be numbered among his greatest artistic triumphs. They are of the nature of caricatures, and he owes his unique place among pictorial satirists to the fact that he is not a caricaturist, but a draughtsman, who can give the effect of caricature apart from its gross body of exaggeration. He never forces the note, and yet he never misses or flattens it. His renderings of aristocratic superciliousness, of smug self-satisfaction, of permanent or momentary mental vacancy, are more relentlessly truthful than the fact, and yet as startlingly effective as any travesty. If the festive host who confidentially informed his guest that his wife had invited all the bores of their acquaintance did not wear the expression of jovial fatuity which Mr du Maurier has given him, the only thing to be said is that he *ought* to have it, because no other expression could be really expressive.

The fact is that Mr du Maurier's fools and bores and snobs and schemers are not caricatures in any legitimate sense of the word. They are rather transcripts from reflections in a magic mirror, which show the true self manifested in some chosen moment of involuntary unreserve.

But even his delicately humorous satirical treatment of a sophisticated society is hardly more noteworthy than his sympathetic handling of the piquant *naïvetés* of child-life. If it were to be asserted that Mr du Maurier's children are his greatest triumphs, assent might be hesitating perhaps, because sensible people handle terms of comparison warily. It is, however, certain that he holds the freedom of the city of childhood; he walks its highways and byeways as one native and to the manner born. What a quiet feeling for that curious combination of savagery and sympathy so often to be observed in children is manifest in the drawing of the two little girls who have just returned from the Doré gallery, where, while one sister has been impressed by the woes of the early Christians, torn and devoured by the lions and tigers, the heart of the other has been full of compassion for the "one poor tiger who had no Christian." How perfect is the precocity of the small feminine morsel who stands at the milliner's window to get "hints" for the lady's maid,—the

proud, self-sufficing gaze of the other very young lady who, on a hot day, will not walk in her tall sister's shadow because "I have a shadow of my own, thank you!"—and the surly modesty of the small boy who, knowing that his is a reflected lustre, describes himself as the "baby's brother." It is in one of these child drawings that Mr du Maurier approves himself a poetical and pathetic, as well as humorous, artist. In the corner, with nothing visible but his poor little back, is the tiny mite of disgraced boyhood, and in the foreground the young, pretty, but severely-just mother and the tender-hearted elder sister, of seven or thereabouts, with her surely irresistible plea, "Oh, mamma, don't scold him any more; it makes the room so dark." The words are all in the tender, troubled face.

As for Mr du Maurier's creation, it surely comes only second to that gift of vision and that power of rendering vision which individualises and interprets every face and every pose. Like the great novelists and dramatists, he can incarnate a type in a new living creature—witness Sir Georgius Midas, the Duchess of Stilton, Maudle, Postlethwaite, and that delightful nonentity, Mr Ponsonby de Tompkins. The resourceful wife of the last-named gentleman is wonderful, but I really think that he is more wonderful still. Individuality of intellectual activity

may need a master to portray it; but for the portrayal of the individuality of vacancy, of helplessness, of utter fatuity, the master must be at his brightest and best. Ponsonby de Tompkins is a creation, and yet we feel the moment we see him that we have known him all our lives—known him without recognising him for what he is. The photographic reveals stars which have never been seen by human eye. So does the magic mirror of the master reflect the hitherto unseen in personality and character, and such a mirror is the art of Mr du Maurier.

Can I be other than unrepentant for my economic sin?

IN ELLERAY WOOD.

A WINDERMERE REVERIE.

I HAVE been here at Windermere for a week, and never, I think, has the practical paradox of time made a week at once so strangely short and so strangely long. Were I to return home to-morrow I know I should feel as if I had never left it, but had merely been visited by a sweet day-dream of purple hills and glancing wavelets and rustling leaves. And yet I seem to be separated from those quiet, monotonous, non-pictorial home-days by a long age of opulent, rapturous, vivid existence. Trite enough is the saying that a life-time of bliss or agony may be crowded into an hour; but the triteness vanishes when the hour comes, and he to whom it comes finds the old commonplace at once transformed into a new truth. Parrot-like, he has been repeating the familiar formula all his life; man-like he has been fancying that he understood it; but some new experience becomes his, and a hidden revelation flashes out upon him from the ancient household words. All com-

monplaces seem dead, but, like the grains of corn in the mummy case, they have a latent vitality; and we never know in what hour the dry, shrivelled aphorism or proverb which we have flippantly tossed about since childhood may start into unsuspected life. As our own life becomes wider and deeper and more intense, our list of commonplaces becomes shorter and shorter, for a commonplace is a truth acknowledged but not realised—a thread of familiar colour not yet cast by the flying shuttle of fate across the lengthening orb of our individual history. Mrs Browning writes in “The Rhyme of the Duchess May”—

“I said in under breath, ‘All our life is mixed with death’”;

and it is just because we lack complete vitality of nature that so many things are commonplace to us. There is but one Being in whom life is not thus mixed with death; and it is as certain that to God no being is commonplace as it is that with Him nothing is impossible.

I came here to rest, and I have thoroughly made up my mind to give myself over to delicious idleness—idleness which refuses compromise with labour even in its disguise of pleasure-seeking. The only pleasures which are absolutely unadulterated are the pleasures which come unsought. I think it simply

painful to feel it a duty to "do" the regular tourist round. I have no sympathy with the man who says *Perdidi diem* at the end of every day which has not made him acquainted with half-a-dozen lakes or hills or waterfalls which he has never seen before, and does not intend ever to see again. I do not value such chance introductions either to men or places, for their only effect is to fill the mind with a throng of confused featureless images. The real man does not unveil himself in the first five minutes of "occasional" conversation; and howsoever open the secret of nature may be, it is not often read from the top of a stage-coach. Any man may follow Mahomet's example and go to the mountain; but if he would have the mountain come to him—that is, if he would feel the spirit of the mountain enter his spirit and possess it—he must yield himself up to what Wordsworth, with unerring feeling for a great but too seldom noted truth of experience, calls a "wise passiveness."

This wise passiveness I have endeavoured to cultivate. I have discovered two or three of the pleasantest of walks, and I find that familiarity, instead of breeding contempt or dulling interest, increases the affection with which I regard every tree or cluster of fern or distant shimmer of sunlighted water. I have something of nature at home—a

tamer, quieter nature than this, but still nature—and one can quote without any accent of depreciation the famous Johnsonian dictum, “Sir, one green field is like every other green field.” Happily it is so, and all green fields are lovable; but at home such green fields and trees as I have at my disposal seem to take their place as a modest background to my friends, my books, my commonplace every-day doings. Here nature comes to the front; she is background and foreground in one, the all in all of sensation and perception. Out of this concentrated interest grows the ever-increasing delight in the simplest natural objects which is mine from day to day. I find myself scrutinising with a loving eye the clinging growth of the wild ivy which clothes with variegated colour the ruinous wall of weather-beaten stone, and extracting somehow or other a new and strange pleasure from the contemplation of waving grasses and gurgling streamlets.

But my favourite haunt is the wood where I often lie all the day long stretched out upon the mossy turf, my limbs luxuriating in a pleasant lassitude, my soul steeped in an all-subduing sense of delicious inactivity, undisturbed by perplexing thought or exciting emotion, conscious of nought but a vague, indescribable satisfaction—the deep, exquisite, painless joy of calm. It is this painlessness of joy which

gives a special character to woodland repose. Most of us have known moments when, coming all at once upon some fine surprise of grandeur or beauty, the thrill of delight has been so intense as to be painful—we have felt the force of Mr William Watson's splendid phrase, "shattering onsets of joy." A man of quick intelligence once confessed in my hearing that to him the phrase had no meaning, and I remembered that the confession seemed to me the condensed autobiography of a mollusc. A conceit-monger might say that, in clutching the rose of rapture, we feel the puncture of the thorn of pain, but the conceit would not be without its meaning. It is possible to be blinded by excess of light, and it is not less possible to feel the sharp pang of sudden vivid pleasure. But amid these quieter beauties, which become familiar through hours of sweet fellowship, joy loses the edge which makes it too keen for delight, and the spirit, though not drawn up to the third heaven in awed suddenness of surprise, is nevertheless borne steadily through the upper air of emotion by unseen hands, and is soothed to repose by a tender flutter of angels' wings.

While I lie in my woodland resting-place, and feel the possession of this exquisite bliss, I am tempted to say with the "mild-eyed, melancholy lotus-eaters"—

"There is no joy but calm,"

—and then, thinking of the perfect poem, I remember how, in the choric song which came murmuringly from between the languid lips of the drowsy wanderers, there are lines, rich in soothing, sleepy music, which speak of the sequestered woodland retreat as the place in which, more than in any other, men find “long rest and dreamful ease.”

“Lo, in the middle of the wood
The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud,
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care ;
Sun-steeped at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed ; and, turning yellow,
Falls and floats adown the air.”

This special wood which is my resort has endless charms which are all its own, but it has also human associations from which it draws an added interest. Every day as I stroll lazily towards the little nook which I have chosen for my own retreat, I pass the cottage—for it is little more—in which were spent the happiest hours in the life of Christopher North. There is one room at the end of the house with long windows formed of many panes, like the windows of a public hall, and in this room, I am told, some of the most successful of his once-famous “Recreations” were written. One can imagine him sitting or lying on the miniature lawn in front of the house, from

which the lake and the opposite pine-covered hill can be seen through the opening in the nearer trees revolving the periods of one of his rhetorical essays, or meditating the quips and cranks for one of the clever, rollicking, and—it must be added—somewhat unscrupulous *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. If we think of man simply as an animal, what a magnificent specimen of his race Wilson was! He had, of course, a fine, alert intelligence, and an expressional gift which enabled him to realise all its possibilities of effectiveness; but his physical powers and capacities were even more remarkable than his mental ones. He made himself a power largely in virtue of that conquering audacity which comes of intense vitality—an audacity which allowed him to accept a chair of Moral Philosophy, and then to write to De Quincey asking what he was to teach about moral obligation. There probably never lived a man who exhibited a perfect balance of soul and body, and there can be little doubt that in Wilson the flesh (not using the word in any degraded sense) was the ruling power. His life was essentially one of sensation rather than of thought: he was sometimes meditative, but his very meditation was emotional. In the room with the long windows he used to hold his Sunday cock-fights; and I doubt not he rejoiced greatly at the sound of the fierce onset, and at the

sound of the shrill crow of triumph. From these odd devotional exercises Christopher probably extracted a fuller rapture than he ever felt at the completion of the most eloquent or stinging *Blackwood* article, and the victory of a favourite bird would bring a thrill that to the ordinary man of letters is all unknown.

A wood like this is just the right place for any man who, like Wilson, has a keen sensitiveness to all the sights and sounds of nature, but whose tendency is to ignore the spiritual side of life. For here all these sights and sounds are suggestive of strange presences which haunt the threshold of consciousness. "There is a spirit in the woods," and no man of quick sensibilities can remain long unconscious of its touch. Wordsworth uttered no paradox of mysticism when he wrote—

"One impulse from a vernal wood
Can teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can."


For the teaching of the sage is bounded and limited by words and forms of thought; he cannot tell to the world all he knows, much less can he communicate the feeling or presentiment (if I may call it so) which he has of truths yet unattained, which,

though through a glass darkly, he still sees, like heavenly angels dimly visible through earthly mists.

“ Dwells within the soul of every artist
More than all his effort can express,”

and if Adelaide Anne Procter had written “every thinker,” her lines would not have been less true.

But the spirit of the wood knows not their limitation. Nature is free from the fetters of words. She has no speech nor language, but nevertheless her voice is heard, and her *Lieder ohne Worte* touch, with an electric thrill, places which lie too deep in the soul to be reached by the articulate word-songs of humanity. Words are the visible and audible symbols of things known and defined; but the charm of Nature lies in the fact that in communion with her we are impressed by the nearness of “worlds not realised”—mystical worlds, the existence of which is felt and believed, but not demonstrated. Words are, for the most part, representatives of things present and palpable; nature’s wordless harmonies are suggestive of things far past and dimly remembered. If my memory does not deceive me, Dante Rossetti chose a wood as the background of his weird drawing, “How they met themselves”; and, like those startled ones, I, too, seem to meet in the woods a phantom of myself, though it is not the



self of to-day or of last spring, but of an immemorial year from which I am separated by a mysterious interval of unconsciousness. It seems to me not fanciful to believe that only a man who had been consecrated to the priesthood of nature could have written that marvellous "Ode of the Intimations of Immortality," for in the silence of the solitary but peopled places—and there only and always—the soul of such an one is overshadowed with the inevitable thought that

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting ;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar."

These are some of the thoughts and fancies that come to me as I lie on the mossy grass, shaded by the boughs of the spreading beech. It may seem an odd preference, but I have always loved the beech as I love no other tree. This might be the result of association, but when I search for the links in the chain I am unable to find them. I am inclined to think that I love it simply for its own sake ; and in the ardour of my devotion I am apt to wonder that those born tree-worshippers, the poets, do not oftener sing its praises. It has not the rugged majesty of the oak or the dignified grace of the elm, but to me it seems pre-eminently a *social* tree,

and in the shadow of its branches, as in the society of a friend, I have a pleasing sense of home. I reverence the ancient oak, I admire the lofty elm, but it is under the beech that I always wish to rest. Its principal, and I think its most fascinating, characteristic is what, for want of a better word, I call *leafiness*, by which I mean that peculiar fulness, and yet separateness, of leaf which belongs to it alone among English trees, and which makes its crossing boughs and interlacing twigs a mass of exquisite forest embroidery. The sycamore has all its fulness and the poplar all its separateness of foliage, but the one presents to the eye only an opaque mass of dull green, and the other has a certain fragmentariness of aspect which gives no promise of grateful shade. And so I choose the beech as the tree under which I think my thoughts of many things, and dream my day-dreams, in which dryads and wood-nymphs glide among the pine-stems, and naiads of beguiling beauty sing softly by the stream.

Through all my meditations the music of that stream runs in a silver thread of melody, and I think how for centuries and æons before man was soothed by its lulling murmur it babbled and chattered in the listening ear of God. Nor can I doubt—though this is to conjecture of things deep and dark—that even the Infinite Mind found pleasure in the earthly

music which fairly though faintly echoed celestial harmonies. For it is thus, one thinks, that He rejoices in the things that He has made. Not alone surely to awe the spirit or to gladden the heart of man was the mountain peak upheaved into the still air, or the autumn leaves tinted with russet and crimson and gold ; it must be that He whose work they are and whose nature they mystically reveal, finds an ineffable joy in these sacramental settings-forth of his own unspeakable infinity. They are, indeed, passages of heavenly poetry written not in words ; pictured symbols of the Divine Nature whose only utility lies in their solemn suggestiveness of beauty—which have no end outside of themselves save to declare His glory who made them beautiful.

“THE LADY OF SHALOTT.”

A TENTATIVE INTERPRETATION.

ONCE upon a time I attended a meeting of the now defunct Browning Society. The subject of the evening was the picturesque, suggestive, and enigmatical poem, “Childe Roland to the dark tower came,” and for considerably more than an hour a member of the Society—evidently a learned, industrious, and subtle-minded gentleman—read a paper, in which he expounded his view of the inner meaning of the work. Other members were ready with their interpretations, but no sooner had the essayist sat down than one uprose who spoke with the authority, not of profound pondering, but of actual knowledge, and who declared that he had that very afternoon gone to the fountain-head and learned from Mr Browning’s own lips that the poem had no meaning at all! A design on a certain piece of tapestry had suggested a story, and in the verse the story was told, but, so far as he knew, it was a story pure and simple—merely that, and nothing more!

This startling statement seemed to take the heart out of most of the audience, but there were one or two sturdy souls who seemed inclined to contend that this was a matter in which even Mr Browning's word was not final ; that art is charged with a significance of which the artist may be unconscious ; that it utters itself, not in rigid propositions, but in fluid symbols which compel an interpretation, though no single interpretation will ever exhaust them. I think that the sturdy souls were right—at anyrate, they have Emerson, and other not unimportant people, on their side—and so I venture to set down certain thoughts which came to me the other evening, after reading, for the hundredth time, Tennyson's lovely "Lady of Shalott." Every one who is likely to read this page must know the poem as well as I, but for the mere pleasure of it, I must transcribe some of the earlier stanzas—

“On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the world and meet the sky ;
And through the field the road runs by
 To many-towered Camelot ;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow,
Round an island there below,
 The island of Shalott.

“Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver,
Through the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river,
 Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle embowers
 The Lady of Shalott.

“By the margin, willow-veiled,
Slide the heavy barges trailed
By slow horses, and unhailed
The shallop fitteth, silken-sailed,
 Skimming down to Camelot.
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land?
 The Lady of Shalott.

“And moving through a mirror clear,
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear:
There she sees the highway near
 Winding down to Camelot;
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village churls,
And the red cloaks of market-girls
 Pass onward from Shalott.”

It appears to me that this history may be regarded
as representative of the history of a woman living in

a conventional world—the world in which so many people live their whole lives—a world whose inhabitants do not come into contact with the true substance of things around them, but to whom these things appear, not as they are in themselves, but as reflections in a mirror which, while it registers faithfully enough some few outside aspects, hides altogether the living soul by which those aspects are produced and governed. Urged by a necessity of nature, the Lady of Shalott has found a task, in the execution of which her mind is occupied and her hours are spent—

“There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay—

a web which symbolises that daily work which is the natural lot of all ; not work in the restricted sense of physical labour, but including all the conscious energies of soul and mind and body,—all the strivings of conscience, all the outgoings of affection, all the exercises of intellect, all the trivial tasks, the little conflicts which make the woven web of every life. The things seen in the mirror—things which are but the reflections of the unknown true—form the materials of the web’s fantastic design : in her words, her life is in harmony with the conventional, unreal world in which she lives. Her thoughts and feelings, her words and actions, are all outlined and coloured by

the influence of the phantasmal panorama which daily passes before her eyes. In this matter she is but a representative of thousands of men and women whose life in the world is an external affair altogether, who live from the surface, not from the centre of their being, men and women who gaze into each other's eyes and merely mark variations of light and colour, not knowing, nor caring to know, anything of the soul behind. It is for these people that what we call conventionalities exist, those laws and customs which neither rise out of, nor are founded on, the inherent nature of things, but on those artificial conditions which must necessarily come into being when the deeper side of life is ignored. But just because these conventional laws are unnatural and arbitrary—because they have no foundation in the central truth of things—they must needs be enforced by imposing sanctions and vague threats of portentous penalties.

“There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay ;
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay,
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.”

But the lady of Shalott has something within her which cannot always be satisfied with a mirror world. She is an Undine, with a soul which is not yet here, but is waiting to be born within her when the moment comes. Of this coming the poem gives plain forewarnings. We are told how—

“ Sometimes through the mirror blue
The knights came riding two and two ; ”

and then we have the line—

“ *She* had no loyal knight and true ; ”

which seems as if it might be the inarticulate cry of the unborn soul, put by the poet into articulate form. In the next verse the indication grows even clearer still.

“ But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror’s magic sights ;
For often through the silent nights
A funeral with plumes and lights,
And music, went to Camelot :
*Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed,
‘ I AM HALF SICK OF SHADOWS,’ said
The lady of Shalott.”*

The two walking under the moon rouse some-

thing that has not been roused before ; and then, just when she is ready for it, comes the one event of her existence : for Sir Lancelot rides by, and with him ride love, life, and death ; the first two together, the last close behind.

“ His broad dear brow in sunlight glowed,
On burnished hooves his war-horse trode,
From underneath his helmet flowed
His coal-black curls as on he rode,—
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flashed into the crystal mirror,
‘Tirra lirra,’ by the river,
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She lookèd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide ;
The mirror cracked from side to side ;
‘The curse is come upon me,’ cried
The Lady of Shalott.”

Yes, the curse is come upon her—come irrevocably ; for the Lady of Shalott is one of those whose aspirations are larger than their capacities, who have

yearnings which are too great for them—yearnings which prompt them to break the chains with which they are bound, only to find that what they thought were fetters were supports as well, without which they fall helplessly, to be trodden to death unpitied and unheeded. There are thousands who are living in what they dimly feel to be a world of reflections, not of substances, of appearances, not of realities; but ever and anon they feel that this is not all there is of life, and they, like the Lady of Shalott, are half sick of shadows. Still, the illusions gather round them again as the moment of illumination passes away, until something comes, most probably in the shape of a supreme passion, which sweeps the old world's illusions away for ever, and reveals the new world of realities lying all round them. Then is the testing time. Have they courage to meet as foes the conventional phantoms they have spurned as friends? Have they limbs with which they can stand and work alone? Have they lungs that can breathe the sharp, new air? Have they hearts that can sustain the pressure of the larger life? If they have these things—well; if not, there is nothing for them but the terrible failure of those who enter upon a warfare at their own charges, unarmed and unprepared. Tired of weary walking in a world of shadows, they have tried to soar into a world of

light, but their wings have failed them, like the wings of Icarus, and, falling headlong, they can even walk no more. They can only die, and on their gravestone the world writes its brief, scornful epitaph, *Ve victis*.

SANDYCOMBES.

A LANDSCAPE WITH ONE FIGURE.

It happens to most of us at some time in our lives to become all at once intimately acquainted with a person or place long familiar to us in a vague sort of way by careless sight or unheeded report; and there is commonly, or at any rate frequently, something almost ludicrous in the difference between the light suggestions of fancy which passed through the mind, leaving hardly a mark behind them, and the enduring impressions of knowledge which no succeeding wear and tear of experience can obliterate. It is with an odd sensation that a man looks at the woman who is now his wife and the mother of his children and thinks of the time when he only knew her as "that girl in black with the St Bernard dog," and when, if the truth must be told, the dog was a more interesting object than the girl. In the same way, it is very strange to me to recall the years—and there were many of them—during which Sandycombes was nothing to me but a name in a railway time-table,

for it was destined to become for a time, so far as my individual consciousness was concerned, the centre of the world—my London, my Paris, my Mecca. I freely admit that it had not the special advantages of those more famous places. Instead of Houses of Lords and Commons we had only a parochial committee, which very discreetly left us alone and allowed us still to be rural. We had no boulevards, but only sandy lanes, bordered by fields, some divided from the roadway by a formal fence, but others melting into it, so that one could hardly say where road ended and field began. We could not boast that we had given birth to a prophet or his modern representative, a newspaper editor, and as we had not even a resident clergyman of the national communion, we were grateful to be saved from entire religious destitution by the presence in our midst of a large-hearted Roman Catholic priest and two genial dissenting ministers, who divided their time, with exquisitely graduated inequality, between gardening and good works. With these provisions for politics, pleasure, and piety, we who lived at Sandycombes were tranquilly content; and those who sighed for more might go to any of the great cities above-mentioned, or, if the suggestion be not too flippant, to Bath.

As I have already hinted, Sandycombes is on a line of railway, so its inhabitants were not shut out

from easy communication, when they desired it, with those chaotic conglomerations of humanity which are ironically known as centres of civilisation. One of these centres was a great abode of business: it had shops and warehouses and markets; it had innumerable slums and immeasurable dirt; and it was, therefore, consoling to think of the fifteen miles which separated us from it. The other was a celebrated abode of pleasure, or of what is supposed to be such, being one of those seaside places which are, as the school geographies would say, "chiefly noted" for children, spades, buckets, fleas, donkeys, shrimps, and German bands. This popular resort—which its inhabitants delight to call the Blankshire Boulogne, or some similarly absurd name—was only four miles distant; but as four miles sufficed to deaden the most discordant notes of Teutonic trombones, and to disperse the odours of the stalest shrimps, the misfortune of this propinquity was not altogether unbearable. From all that can be seen, or heard, or smelt, Sandycombes might be as "far from noise and smoke of town" as was that "careless ordered garden" to which the late laureate invited his friend Maurice, or as the ideal "lodge in some vast wilderness" whither Cowper desired to flee that he might escape the things which pained his ear and sickened his heart.

There are people who say that Sandycombes has no beauty, but they are not people who know it well. Who is there that has not somewhere in his heart, either as a love of the present or as a cherished memory of the past, the image of a face which he once thought plain because it revealed not to his casual glance any commanding grace of features or conquering charm of expression, but which, through long years, he has seen made sweet by saintliness, luminous by unselfish love, bright by simple gaiety, and which, therefore, is now a joy-giving thing of beauty for ever. It has always seemed to me that the landscape which is most enduringly delightful and satisfying is that which resembles these countenances—landscape which has no permanent features that touch the beholder all at once with a keen thrill, but which, because it has so little of its own, takes with unvarying graciousness such gifts of beauty as the sun and the winds and the clouds may have to bestow, responding to the changeful moods of Nature with a quick sympathy that makes its apparent commonness the medium of sweet and subtle revelations. In the presence of the Alps we may miss the message of the wild-flowers at our feet, and few, I should imagine, when their ears are full of the roar of Niagara, would think of listening for the songs of the birds whose fellows are to be heard in any

English wood ; but where the elements of pleasure are many and simple, where none overpowers the others, but each is solicitous rather than aggressive, pleading for regard but making no demand upon admiration—there the great harmony of things comes home to us, and fills us with a quiet restfulness more enduring and more sanative than the sudden access of a stormy delight.

It is thus at Sandycombes, which is one of those places where Nature puts off her deity and humbles herself to human companionship. The railway line of which I have spoken separates two very diverse landscapes, both having their special charms, and each contributing something to the charm of the other. Westward between the line and the mile-distant sea stretches an apparently endless expanse of sandhills, infinite in their variety of form and magnitude ; here bearing the appearance of a miniature mountain range, peaked and precipiced ; there having the semblance of a mass of exaggerated molehills ; and here, there, and everywhere catching the eye in every degree of indescribable shapelessness. Now and then the wanderer comes to a place where the hills enclose hollows which almost attain to the dignity of valleys, embosoming tiny lakes—locally known as “slacks”—and occasionally among the endless complexity of curves the eye is refreshed by the straight

outline of an upland slope which, were it magnified a thousand times and covered with green turf instead of yellow sand, would rival a Berkshire down. The only other line to be seen by the gazer westward which gives even an impression of straightness is that line which the eye makes rather than sees—the long surrounding horizon which confers upon the meanest as well as the mightiest the dignity of standing in the centre of a circle to which Nature herself supplies a circumference.

It must be admitted that one of the first and strongest impressions stamped by this landscape upon the mind of a stranger is an impression of barrenness, which is not dispelled but perhaps rather intensified by the coarse rush-like star-grass which has year by year added to its territory, and threatens soon to occupy every hill and hollow. This prickly and, on the whole, unbeauteous growth is not, however, the only green living thing of which our hills can boast, for in the summer they are rich in wild-flowers,—in red pimpernels, and blue speedwells, and white anemones, and sunny patches of yellow bloom for which my scanty science has no name. After a few weeks of fair weather the slacks dry up, and disclose a light layer of soil, formed, it must be, by the decay of the aquatic vegetation of centuries, and here are to be found little oases of velvety turf, and starry mosses,

green and brown, and golden, with other flowers than these simple familiar creatures—rare beauties of which Sandycombes boasts (or rather possesses, for I hear no boasting) a proud monopoly, and which enthusiastic botanists from the great world far away come to see and capture.

But even those to whom these details of Nature's bounteousness make no special appeal can hardly fail to be won by the silent, soothing restfulness of the whole landscape. There is something almost unique in the peculiar stillness in which this region is wrapped as in a garment. Every country place seems strangely quiet to the townsman, who misses, without knowing what he misses, the eternal roar of voiceful streets; but after a few days he discovers that the country has also its voices, and his ear, which seemed so empty, becomes filled with the lowing of the cows, the call of the ploughboy to his team, the bird melodies in the coppice, or the more prosaic and town-like hum of the threshing-machine in the stack-yard at the farm. Here, however, even these sounds are absent. Now and then a partridge may spring up with that whirr-r-r-r which the sportsman knows so well, or one may send a rabbit scattering through the star-grass, or a solitary lark may rain down music from the empyrean, or the sea may send up that "listless chime," which

is, indeed, "time's self made audible"; but the partridge, the rabbit, and the lark are not always to be heard; the sea on still summer days seems dumb even to the most intent listener; and then the silence has a weight and, as it were, a body, upon which the tired spirit can lean itself and rest.

And beyond the quiet sandhills is the quiet shore; all the more quiet because it is not shingled but sandy, so that on sunny, windless days there is not even the pleasant lapping of water on pebbles, but only a slow, noiseless stealing over gently swelling banks, with no interruption of the absolute silence save the lazy breaking of some tired wave. At spring tides the water rolls up to the base of the seaward sandhills, but at other times there is a fair margin of beach, and at ebb a wide expanse, full of shallow pools, which at sunset sublimates the dead level by drawing earthward the crimson and saffron of the sky. Looking westward, the wanderer on the shore—who is likely to be lonely enough save in the hot July and August noons, when smooth white figures of bathing boys provide the landscape with ideal figures—will see nothing but the far-off horizon, and perhaps a fishing-smack or two, or the smoke of some distant steamer.

Northward the eye rests on the long straight outline of the pier of the watering-place aforesaid, and



beyond this, low hills, and far to the west of these the dimly descried form of Black Combe, celebrated by Wordsworth as the mountain from whose summit is to be had the amplest unobstructed prospect which British ground affords. Southward a dusky cloud hangs above the great town, but to the right of this cloud mountain shapes in long line and close mass heave themselves aloft, and the gazer knows them for the Cambrian titans, of which Snowdon is the chief—the giant slopes from which, in the verse of Gray, if not in the prose of history, the last of the bards of Wales chanted his despairing and fateful defiance of the English invader. This far-stretching level, with its firm ground for the foot, and its sharp, bracing air for the lungs, and its unobtrusive beauty of wave and sky and distant mountain, and its haunting suggestions of infinity, is the very place for conscious self-communion, or, still better, for submission to that restful inertia in which there is no consciousness but of half-apprehended delight. Here, surely, is the place in which to ask—

“Think you, ’mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?”

and to answer, with no real disdain for the good

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things we for the moment set aside, because, though good, they are not the best—

“ Sweet is the lore which Nature brings ;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things—
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art ;
Close up those barren leaves :
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.”

And if at Sandycombes one begins to quote from Wordsworth, the quotation cannot but bring memories of a later-born singer who, where Rotha flows by Wordsworth's grave, found inspiration for a poem which will surely always be numbered among the great English elegies. For it was hither—to this abode of quietness which I have tried to save from the rude assault of celebrity by pseudonymous disguise—that William Watson, in those days when Poetry was his sole comrade, and Fame was waiting far ahead upon life's dusty road, loved to wander from the pleasant home, barely a league away. Among these sand-dunes the fairy fantasy of “The Prince's Quest” grew to form and beauty. Here the poet saw the vision of the City of Youth and of its lovely love-inspiring Queen ; here he traced

the marvellous wanderings of the dream-enamoured Prince ; here he wove the melodious numbers of the rapturous bridal song—

“ And she our Queen—ah, who can tell what hours
She bode his coming in her palace-towers,
Unmated she in all the land alone ?
’Twas yours, O youths and maids, to clasp and kiss ;
Desiring and desired ye had your bliss ;
The Queen she sat upon her loveless throne.
Sleeping she saw his face, but could not find
Its phantom’s phantom when she waked, nor bind
About her finger one gold hair of his.

“ Often when evening sobered all the air,
No doubt but she would sit and marvel where
He tarried, by the bounds of what strange sea ;
And, peradventure, look at intervals
Forth of the windows of her palace walls,
And watch the gloaming darken fount and tree ;
And think on twilight shores, with dreaming caves,
Full of the groping of bewildered waves,
Full of the murmur of their hollow halls.”

These were the subtly-inwrought melodies that came to the boy-singer—for the year of manhood was not yet reached—among the sea of sandhills : richer and weightier harmonies of sombre imaginative contemplation sounded in his ears as he paced the solitary marge of the moving sea hard by, and felt its sudden darkening at the day’s decline—

“As one whose eyes have watched the stricken day
Swoon to its crimson death adown the sea,
Turning his face to eastward, suddenly
Sees a lack-lustre world all chill and gray;
Then wandering sunless whitherso he may,
Feels the first dubious dim obscurity,
And vague foregloomings of the Dark to be,
Close like a sadness round his glimmering way;
So I, from drifting dreambound on and on
About strange isles of utter bliss, in seas
Whose waves are unimagined melodies,
Rose and beheld the dreamless world anew:
Sad were the fields, and dim with splendours gone,
The strait sky-glimpses fugitive and few.”

When some new William Howitt writes a new “Homes and Haunts of the Poets,” his book will have a great gap if there is no chapter devoted to Sandycombes, which nurtured so rare a poetic personality. There are those of us who have little else to boast of, but who feel that we can walk among our fellows with uplifted heads, because in those old days, when William Watson crossed our path, we “saw him and named a star.” Sandycombes has other associations. Thither, to a certain cottage-home, came Hall Caine, full of unrealised ambitions, pondering the evolution of “The Shadow of a Crime”; Alexander Ireland, the friend of Leigh Hunt, Carlyle, Emerson, the Chamberses, and

Charles Cowden Clarke, full of years and honours ; David Main, glorying in the completion of his monumental "Treasury of Sonnets," which had absorbed the moments of seven crowded years of toil ; and Alfred Perceval Graves, the scholarly young Irishman, who had just won the ear of the world with the delicious song, " Father O'Flynn " ; but somehow, when I think of Sandycombes, the figure in the foreground is always that of the youth with a face like the face of Dante, who had written " The Prince's Quest," and who was destined to write " Wordsworth's Grave."

Returning from the shore, and walking on until, from some high sandhill, the landward horizon is disclosed, a very different scene meets the eye. A level, well-cultivated, but sparsely-wooded landscape, like a hundred other English landscapes, but somewhat flatter than such an expanse is wont to be, even with us — a singularly uninteresting bit of country, as ninety-nine out of a hundred people would probably describe it — perhaps even the hundredth also, seeing it but once, and then for a few moments only. But, as I have said, it is a landscape which requires knowing ; and just as we love better, though we may admire less, the simple flowers we have with our own hands sown and tended, than the exotic splendours which bloom in the great

man's conservatory hard by, so there is a special preciousness in occult beauties which have been left for us to discover, and have been discovered by us, as we fondly think, for the first time. How pleasant, in Spring mornings, to trace the far-off lane by the long line of its white, hawthorn hedgerow; to sit through sleepy Summer afternoons, fishing-rod in hand, by the wide watercourse which drains the peat-moss, and watch the yellow field on the distant upland, which seems a veritable patch of sunshine fastened down to earth; or to wait until the window of an unseen cottage, miles away, echoes like a flashing pharos-light the gleam of an Autumn sunset. Of these things, and other things than these, how much more might be said; but when a place has become a part of one's self, a celebration of its beauties seems almost like a diffused egotism. Some of the charms of Sandycombes I have tried to sketch, but the subtlest and most delight-giving elude the grasp of language, and the pen fails to tell of the joys of eye and heart which have been vouchsafed to me, and to others, who have learned to love it since the days, not very far past, when the builder's trowel first rang musically through its clear air, beneath its open sky.

TWO THANET SKETCHES.

I.

IN BIRCHINGTON CHURCHYARD.

No lover of the high things of poetry who visits the Isle of Thanet will desire to cross its boundary on his homeward way until he has made his pilgrimage to Birchington-on-Sea, where Dante Gabriel Rossetti spent his last weeks of life, and where his body lies in the pretty little rural churchyard. Birchington stands on the Thanet coast; only a few miles London-ward of those popular resorts, Ramsgate and Margate; but the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*, to whom they are dear, have never looked into the eyes of "the Blessed Damozel," or spelt out the starry symbols of "the House of Life," and, apart from its single association, Birchington is curiously devoid of obvious attractions. It is like the face of a plain maiden, glorified only by one transfiguring expression, which few are privileged to see; and those who see it not may be forgiven if

they pass regardlessly by. True, there is the delicate charm of silence, accentuated at the hour of wind-swept flood by the sea's "listless chime," which to the dead poet seemed "Time's self . . . made audible"; but even silence needs for its full beatitude some re-enforcement of beauty, and of beauty other than that of the sunlighted waves—which is a grace of vesture rather than of body—Birchington has no dower.

Seaward of the railway line, which takes its place on its way from London to Ramsgate, are flat grassy spaces, with a painfully obvious expression of waiting for the speculative builder, who is, I doubt not, on his way to them. Intersecting each other at mathematically accurate right angles are roads of garish newness, and scattered up and down them are still newer villas, dear to those who feel a certain blissful dignity in mere remoteness from the herd. The clustered bungalows, which give Birchington a certain *cachet* of aristocracy—pretty wooden structures, in which Indian fashions are adapted to English requirements—stand nearer to the sea than the newer brick houses; but the long, rambling white dwelling, with its graceful verandah and its pleasant garden, which Mr Seddon placed at the disposal of the dying poet, is some distance inland, though it is, as yet, the last house in Beach Avenue, which seems to be the

main thoroughfare—howbeit few are those who fare thereon—between the railway station and the solitary shore. Prior to 1882 it was simply known as “The Bungalow”; now the name “Rossetti,” painted on the gate-posts, tells the pilgrim that here the great painter-poet and poet-painter was overtaken by “the desultory feel of death.”

To reach the churchyard the visitor has to retrace his steps from the bungalow, to recross the railway line, and to take the road which leads to the little village, about a quarter of a mile further inland. Heretofore he has encountered nothing but a mere deficiency of beauty, now he is confronted by positive ugliness. The few old cottages are decayed and squalid rather than picturesque, the newer buildings recall the cheap, unfinished London suburb. One can hardly give the name of fields to the untidy, badly-fenced, grassy patches; and the little bits of market-garden are defaced by bare, unsightly wooden sheds. The old and the new are in conflict, and each has damaged the other without securing any advantage to itself. When, however, one reaches the village proper, one finds that the old is, in the main, master of the field, though even the antiquity of the village is “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of” modernity. It is only when one enters the churchyard that one seems really able to cut oneself loose

from to-day. Here "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep"; and if their shades visit the place where their bodies repose, they will meet no roughly crude reminder of the fact that "the old order changes, yielding place to new." The pretty old church itself, built of flint boulders, bedded in cement—a conglomerate of material which seems to have long been in favour hereabouts—belongs to the time when the severity of Early English was beginning to blossom in beauty of tracery, though a Saxon font within the building seems to hint at a still more venerable antiquity.

Close to the entrance-door on the south side of the church is the grave which is the goal of our pilgrimage. At the foot of the grassy mound is a spreading bush, which somewhat unmannerly encroaches on sacred soil, and which might, with manifest advantage, be removed. At the head stands a Runic cross, bearing on its back and front two inscriptions. That on the back informs the wayfaring pilgrim that "This cruciform monument, bespoken by Dante Rossetti's mother, was designed by his lifelong friend, Ford Madox Brown, executed by J. and W. Pater-son, and erected by his brother William and his sister Christina Rossetti."

The inscription in front, which is, of course, the epitaph proper, runs thus:—

"Here sleeps Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti, honoured, under the name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, among painters as a painter, and among poets as a poet. Born in London, of parentage mainly Italian, 12th of May 1828; died at Birchington, 9th of April 1882."


The word "mainly," on a monumental inscription, seems almost a superfluous refinement of accuracy, as among Rossetti's immediate progenitors only his maternal grandmother was of wholly non-Italian descent; but it may have been thought well, and was certainly not unfitting, to commemorate, if only by an allusive hint, the strain of English blood in one who, though his name bespeaks the countryman of Dante and Petrarch, will always be numbered among the great poets of England.

∴ The four arms of the cross—which enclose in each angle a symbolical pomegranate, the fruit with heart of sanguine seed—are devoted to a design suggested by Rossetti's mystical ballad, "Eden Bower." Lilith, half snake, half woman, who, according to Talmudic legend, was the first wife of Adam, grips with her lower serpentine coils the trunk of one of the forbidden trees of Eden; her bosom rests upon the dividing fork; the head rises above it in delicate poise; and the lithe arms stretch along the branches to grasp the rounded fruit. Underneath is a marriage, and as the figure of the bridegroom is unmistakably

that of Dante, we must infer that the female figure is Beatrice, who was indeed the immortal bride of his spirit. As, however, the design is a frank departure from the actual history of a "love that never knew his earthly close," it may be assumed that the designer's conception has a symbolic and personal reference to the real life of Rossetti, who not only translated the "*Vita Nuova*," but in "*Dante at Verona*," entered into dramatic realisation of the prideful sorrow of the great Florentine. This assumption is borne out by two significant details. Dante carries in his hand a volume, which recalls the volume that Rossetti buried in the coffin of his dead wife, and the priest who officiates with bandaged eyes seems to play the part of a blind presiding destiny. Underneath this suggestive piece of symbolism is a winged Assyrian bull, which at once carries the memory to the sombre imaginative mournful mockery that utters itself in the stately monotone of "*The Burden of Nineveh*"; and underneath this again is a design so simple that he who runs may read. An old monk-painter sits at his easel, and at the touch of death the brush falls from his right hand. The bent thumb of his left hand still holds the palette, and as the cowl slips from his head it is seen to be encircled by the aureole. Lastly, at the very base of the cross, and immediately above the epitaph, is what

appears to be the ground-plan of a maze or labyrinth—fit image of the mystery of life—the involved curves shaping themselves at one spot into a monogram formed of the initials “D.G.R.” To the careless tourist the monumental stone may seem too elaborately inscribed with half-veiled significance; but to such an one the designer did not appeal, and those who have lovingly read the riddle of Rossetti will not fail to read the riddle of his friend who has now joined him in that Beyond which to us on the hither side is the greatest riddle of all.

Within the church, at the western end of the southern wall, is the memorial window, placed there “to the glory of God and in memory of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,” by the poet’s venerable mother. There are two lights, and each is devoted to a separate design. That on the right, executed by one of the poet’s artist friends, represents Christ’s gift of sight to the blind man. At the door of the synagogue behind the principal figures stand two gloomy Pharisees; up a long path to the distant sea of Galilee a flock of sheep follows the shepherd; and white doves circle in the upper air. The left light is occupied by Rossetti’s own design, originally embodied in a drawing, “The Passover in the Holy Family”; and in the volume of “Poems” (1870) he himself describes the theme—



"The scene is in the house-porch, where Christ holds a bowl of blood from which Zacharias is sprinkling the posts and lintel. Joseph has brought the lamb, and Elizabeth lights the pyre. The shoes which John fastens, and the bitter herbs which Mary is gathering, form part of the ritual."

In the volume these sentences stand as a footnote to one of the many sonnets which Rossetti wrote to accompany and interpret his own pictures and drawings, and in the poem is crystallised the spiritual significance which the drawing holds in solution.

"Here meet together the prefiguring day
And day prefigured. 'Eating, thou shall stand
Feet shod, loins girt, thy road-staff in thine hand,
With blood-stained door and lintel,'—did God say
By Moses' mouth in ages passed away.
And now, when this poor household doth comprise
At Paschal-Feast two kindred families,—
Lo! the slain lamb confronts the lamb to slay.

The pyre is piled. What agony's crown attained,
What shadow of death the Boy's fair brow subdues
Who holds that blood wherewith the porch is stained
By Zachary the priest? John binds the shoes
He deemed himself not worthy to unloose;
And Mary culls the bitter herbs ordained."

The legends accompanying the designs, "The light shineth in darkness," and "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," interpret the unity of the double

composition—the presentation of Christ as illuminator and redeemer.

As my friends and I left the little churchyard behind us, and retraced our steps in the clear light of a July evening, even the obtrusive uncomeliness of the flat dusty lane had lost its power to irritate and depress ; for we had been in high companionship, and Rossetti still walked with us by the way, murmuring his own words of mingled questioning and courage.

“ The Past is over and fled ;
Named new, we name it the old ;
Thereof some tale hath been told,
But no word comes from the dead ;
Whether at all they be,
Or whether as bond or free,
Or whether they too were we,
Or by what spell they have sped.
Still we say as we go,—
‘ Strange to think by the way,
Whatever there is to know
That shall we know one day.’ ”

II.

A RAMSGATE ARABIAN NIGHT.

As I sit down to memorise as best I may a perfect hour, certain verses written by Denis Florence MacCarthy—which, as a boy, I used to love with a sentimental passion for their melody of music and mournfulness of regret—return to me and bring with them the thoughts of the old days—

“ As fire-flies fade
When the nights are damp,
As meteors are quenched
In a stagnant swamp,
Thus Charlemagne’s camp,
Where the Paladins rally,
And the Diamond Valley
And Wonderful Lamp,
And all the wonders
Of Ganges and Nile,
And Haroun’s rambles
And Crusoe’s isle,
And princes who smile
On the Genii’s daughter,
’Neath the Orient waters
Full many a mile ;

And all that the pen
Of Fancy can write,
Must vanish
In manhood's misty light."

Yes, I suppose it is true. Such "fallings from us, vanishings," are among the inevitable withdrawals of life; but the glories do not wholly pass,—they visit us in vision and day-dream; and sometimes we have ourselves a night not less full of beauty and marvel than any of the nights of the good Caliph who ruled in Bagdad in the immemorial long ago. And surely of these nights this has been one.

The spot where we stand is on the chalk cliff, a hundred feet or more above the sea, and the wash of the waves that is here very faint makes a pleasant murmur in the starlight. Just at this point there is a gap between the ridge which gives us standing ground and its neighbour a quarter of a mile distant, and in the hollow are the clustered houses of the lower town, with a dream-like picturesqueness in every line and angle of gable or chimney-stack. Below, in the direction in which Jules and I are both gazing, is the little harbour, which might, for all that we can see, be a large one, for the breakwater-pier which divides it from the wider stretch of wave outside is from this point invisible; but there are long perpendicular twinklings of light in the gently undulating

water, and against the darkness, which is not wholly dark, the bold lines and tapering masts of half-a-dozen fishing-smacks are sharply silhouetted. The strains of one of the tenderest airs from "Fidelio" steal upward out of the shadow below; around us, ascending and descending strollers, singly or in couples and chatting groups, pass leisurely by; and above, in the spacious quiet, are a few stars, over which a light scud passes slowly with instants of eclipse, followed by re-births of radiance. It is hard to say whether one's looking or one's listening brings a finer sense of restfulness and remoteness; it is probably the fortunate alliance of the two which gives to the moment its special fascination, for when the air from "Fidelio" dies in its final poignant chords, and the succeeding silence is broken by the first bars of an up-to-date melody, the situation is not quite what it was five minutes ago, though the lamplights still quiver in the ripples of the harbour, and the stars yet twinkle overhead.

The golden moment has passed, and with silent common consent we move away, sauntering down the slope by which the lower town is reached from the cliff. The notes of the music-hall tune become more strident, and, skirting the crowd gathered round the musicians, we thread our way through the rude bustle of the noisy street—ablaze with public-

houses, cheap restaurants, and illuminated oyster-stalls—which abuts upon the darkness of the inner harbour that we have seen from above. A sudden turn takes us from the glare and the jostle of the crowd into an open space, dim and comparatively empty of wayfarers, in the midst of which a ghostly obelisk points to Sirius, a tiny golden cresset, poised in the black above. Again music—the night here seems full of it. The sound of a hymn, sung by congregated voices, comes fitfully upon the bland air, and as we reach the broad stone pier, which curves halfway round the outer and larger harbour, we look over the low, broad wall upon a little throng of *al fresco* worshippers. In the sunlight the scene would be commonplace, perhaps vulgar; now it is rich in picturesque externals, and charged with vague emotional suggestions. The tide is advancing, but it has not yet covered the pools left by the morning flood, which hold in their shining shallows a weird light, reflected from we know not where. The worshippers are crowded, almost huddled, together on the strip of shore between the black, oily waves and the narrow stone parapet, which, at an elevation of two or three feet above high-water mark, here bounds the beach. A couple of lamps on stout iron supports, driven into the sand, shed their glow on the performer at a small harmonium—a grey-haired man, whose

kindly, weak, blunt-featured face is one of the high lights of the picture. He sings vigorously, swaying slightly from side to side as his fingers move familiarly among the keys ; and many voices out of the inner circle of radiance, and the dark outer ring, join in the strain of the often-repeated chorus—

“ Home, beautiful home !
Bright, beautiful home !
Bright home of our Saviour,
Bright, beautiful home ! ”

The tune is one of those catchy melodies which are to the ear what the chromo-lithographic landscape of commerce is to the eye ; but here, in the darkness, close to the gleaming pools and the black wave, with its fitful fringe of white, with the Rembrandt-like chiaroscuro created by the strong relief of light against patches and masses of shadow in the singing crowd, it seems to absorb some of the glamour of the whole scene, and to become instinct with the yearning of homeless wanderers within sight of peace and rest.

When the hymn is ended, and a pale young man with long, straight black hair steps forward out of the darkness into the lighted circle, and begins to speak with shrill imperative voice, the spell of the pilgrim-song is broken, and we turn away to fare

seaward along the dark pier. To our right is the harbour, black and still, where lie at anchor the little rowing-boats and the yachts whose tall masts and slender cordage make lines of deeper blackness. The boundary of vision is now the long outline of the pier on the other side of the harbour, and the red gleam from its lighthouse lantern is duplicated and elongated tremulously below. We reach the end of the now almost deserted causeway, and gaze out over the sea. There is little breeze, and the waves move smoothly and languidly, with only an infrequent break into a sudden, quickly-vanishing line of whiteness. At intervals of a minute or so a tiny spark on the far horizon grows to radiance, and in a moment wanes: it is the revolving light upon the fatal Goodwin Sands. The splash of the waves against the stone barrier has a music finer than that of the singing worshippers, and yet the charm of the homely intimate human note is wanting. A fishing-smack glides between the piers into the sheltered anchorage, and we turn homeward. Now the whole scene is changed. The harbour that was so dark and sombre as we fared seaward is now a field of congregated lights, separated here and there by spaces of blackness, but elsewhere clustered together, gleaming everywhere with such steadiness as is permitted by undulations which momentarily break and

then re-unite them. The pageantry of Oriental romance, dear to boyhood, is present once more, not to the mind only but to the sense. Here are Aladdin's palace and Cassim's cave, all ablaze with the scintillation of a thousand points and masses of lustrous topaz set in shining ebony. Above are tier upon tier of radiance—the low line of lights upon the strand; higher, the grouped windows of the town houses and hostels; higher still, the illumination which marks the long stretch of cliff summit. Below, all this is wondrously repeated and transfigured in the repetition—an under-sea festival of splendour, as if the submerged Savannah-la-Mar of De Quincey were celebrating some high solemnity, for there are seeming palace windows, across which the shadows of unseen figures come and go. Something approaching to the strange beauty of the picture I have seen where night has fallen on the harbour of Valetta or the glories of the Golden Horn, but never anywhere else in England have I witnessed such a scene of enchantment. We stand and gaze, but we cannot stand for ever; and as the harbour clock strikes ten we regain the noisy, prosaic street, leaving our Arabian Night in the past behind us.

PRINTED BY
TURNBULL AND SPEARS,
EDINBURGH.

